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204 N. Lexington Avenue • Wilmore, KY 40390 • 859.858.3581

8401 Valencia College Lane • Orlando, FL 32825 • 407.482.7500

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ABSTRACT

PREACHING IN POSTMODERN TIMES: A PEER MENTORING PREACHING PROGRAM FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLICAL PREACHING WITHIN THE EMERGING POSTMODERN CONTEXT

by

Ric Dallas Strangway

The purpose of this study was to develop, implement, and evaluate a peer mentoring preaching program (PMPP) that enables other preachers to communicate effectively to an emerging postmodern culture. The program took a group of like-minded participants through a ten-month course that introduced them to ten key qualities of effective preaching as they relate to postmodernism. By the end of the study, the goal was to develop a practical mentoring program for preaching so that the participants could become effective in the kingdom work of incarnational preaching.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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PROGRAM FOR EFFECTIVE BIBLICAL PREACHING WITHIN THE EMERGING
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presented by


Ric Dallas Strangway

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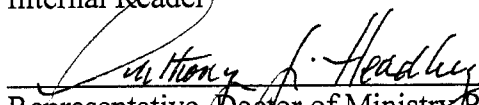
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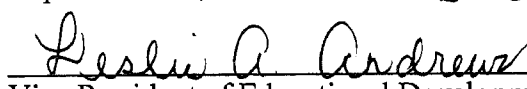
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PREACHING IN POSTMODERN TIMES: A PEER MENTORING PREACHING
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POSTMODERN CONTEXT

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Ric Dallas Strangway

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CHAPTER 1

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

One of the most significant lectures I have heard was delivered in Darrell Whiteman's Cultural Anthropology class at Asbury Theological Seminary in the summer of 2000. It came at a time when I was searching for answers, looking to understand what is needed to connect with a world that is increasingly disconnected with the things of modern faith and religion. Little did I know what was waiting for me as I entered that class.

Whiteman identified the doctrine of the incarnation as a critical piece of revelation that underscores faith and practice. It was more than God taking the form of humanity; he observed that Jesus became a Jew who had immersed himself in the language, dress, and activities of a first-century, Middle Eastern culture. Now this new understanding was a watershed moment for me—a moment when everything in my spiritual journey came to take on a new perception. The purpose of the incarnation was not only foundational to the atonement, it also provides an impetus for missions; it defines not only what the church is to do but how and why the church is to be engaging the world. For the first time, I understood the value of the incarnation and its impact on my faith and practice. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to go out and make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). Like Jesus, every follower is to live amongst the people they are reaching, speaking their language, understanding their lifestyle, listening to their music, and identifying with their life experiences. In fact, I am convinced that anything less than immersion into the culture is not a true response to the call that Jesus Christ puts on every follower. Jesus' example has given a whole new area for consideration.

Therefore, the challenge in my mind was figuring out how to “in flesh” the Word as a biblical communicator. I needed to learn how to bridge the gap between the ancient text and the contemporary audience as Jesus had done two thousand years ago. If my preaching was going to be effective I needed to speak in the language and culture of my audience. With this line of thinking I was led to explore the relationship of the incarnation to biblical preaching and, in turn, this research project.

The Problem

To have a better understanding of my quest, I need to walk through some of the critical thoughts and influences that have shaped me so far. My greatest love in ministry is preaching and earliest recollection of my call was to preach. Some time before the age of fourteen, I sensed the clear, still voice of God’s Spirit impress on my heart the desire to preach the Word. I believed then, as I do today, that God has spoken and that God still speaks today. I have understood the Word of God as the divine revelation, given to all humanity as an invitation into his redemptive plan of salvation and rule for life. It is a message of faith, hope, and love that speaks with clarity and authority over the believers life. It has a power that is lifechanging because it is rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the apostle Paul said to the first-century Church, “And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers” (1 Thess. 2:13, NIV).

Yet as I grew older I observed that the authority of God’s Word was under question by many. People, not just outside but inside the church, did not value the message of the Bible in their lives. They did not see its relevance and looked at the Bible

as outdated and impractical for daily living. Others saw this sacred revelation as quite common, not unlike the writings of any religious group. Yet, in my evaluation, the people in the pew were not the only ones who were missing the point, the preachers in the pulpit were just as far off. They had lost their confidence in the Bible as the revelation of God that speaks with authority and relevance to the world today.

That observation has not left me. A growing number of people are becoming disillusioned with the value of the Bible for their lives. The messages that are being preached are often lacking in biblical substance, and the preachers who preach them lack biblical conviction. For those who do believe in the authority of God's Word often spend a great deal of time on exposition with little to no explanation of application. In the end both those in the church and out are left with a loss.

John R. W. Stott describes this current situation best in his seminal book, Between Two Worlds. Stott indicates a gap between the world of the Bible and the world of our contemporary audience. The call of the contemporary preacher is to bring the one to the other, to stand in the gap and cross two thousand years of changing culture. "Our task," says Stott, "is to enable God's revealed truth to flow out of the Scriptures into the lives of men and women today" (138). It begins with a conviction in the living God and moves to the place where the living God is speaking a living message to a living people (137).

The challenge for the biblical communicator is to do that well. He or she must seek to bring life and clarity from a text that is buried in the times and histories of past peoples and previous cultures. The preacher has to become a student of the world of the Bible and the world in which he or she lives.

I believe this is best understood when there is an understanding of how the

incarnation bears on the process of biblical preaching. Phillips Brooks offers a classic definition of preaching that is useful here: “Preaching is the communication of truth by man to men. [It] is the bringing of truth through personality” (9). Brooks goes on to say, “The chief function of the minister is to translate speculative truth into personal character and to relate clearly and practically to daily life” (19). According to Brooks the task of preaching involves two elements: truth and personality. The meaning of the Word has to be opened up, and then that truth needs to be “incarnated” through the life of the preacher and into the life of the audience. “Truth,” says Brooks, “is in itself a fixed and stable element; the personality is a varying and growing element” (68).

What is interesting about Brooks’ classic definition is that he has captured this idea of incarnational preaching, the timeless, sacredness of the Word translated through the heart and life of the preacher to a specific people in a specific place. In referring to Brooks’ definition, David and Warren Wiersbe indicate that the incarnation of Christ is evidence that God mediates this truth through human personality (19). Ian Pitt-Watson says the Word of God is brought to bear on the listener in three ways: (1) in Jesus Christ as the Word made flesh, (2) in the written word of Scripture, and (3) in the preached word (14). This third way is key for the biblical communicator. God’s message of redemption and hope is a message carried through the preacher to a specific people in a specific context.

The preaching of the Word, then, is intrinsically tied to this concept of incarnation. True biblical communication is nonexistent if the divine truth and the human condition are not both tied together. That is why Stott’s image of standing between two worlds and bridging the gap is so valuable. It keeps the reality of both worlds in tension.

To further his point, Stott identifies six biblical images of the Christian preacher: herald, sower, ambassador, steward, shepherd, and worker. He explains this further:

[W]hat is immediately notable about these six pictures is their emphasis on the “givenness” of the message. Preachers are not to invent it; it has been entrusted to them. [T]he preacher is a servant under someone else’s authority, and the communicator of somebody else’s word. (136-37)

Thus, the preacher’s task is clearly the communication of the God-given message. Stott goes on to say that what these images make less clear is the need to bring that word into a specific context. He suggests a need for another metaphor. Hence, he proposes the idea of *bridgebuilding* as a clearer image of the task (137).

The challenge of being faithful to this task is, on the one hand, remaining true to the biblical text and, on the other hand, relevant to the contemporary situation. Stott presents the challenge clearly:

Thus the great doctrines of inspiration and incarnation have established a divine precedent for communication. God condescended to our humanity, though without surrendering his deity. Our bridges too must be firmly anchored on both sides of the chasm, by refusing either to compromise the divine content of the message or to ignore the human context in which it has to be spoken. *We have to plunge fearlessly into both worlds, ancient and modern, biblical and contemporary, and to listen attentively to both. For only then will we understand what each is saying, and so discern the Spirit’s message to the present generation* [emphasis mine]. (145)

With this challenge in mind I sought to discover how to take this concept of incarnational preaching, literally, “in-fleshing” the Word, and apply it to the task of communicating in the present contemporary context. In my mind, the task and the message are clear. The critical elements to discern are the defining characteristics of the present contemporary context and the manner in which the message is given.

Theological Foundation

To understand the need for effective biblical preaching, a solid theological foundation is needed. Some two thousand years ago, the apostle John opened his Gospel with these incredible words:

In the beginning the Word already existed. He was with God, and he was God. He was in the beginning with God. He created everything there is. Nothing exists that he didn't make. Life itself was in him, and this life gives light to everyone. The light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it...

So the Word became human and lived here on earth among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father. (John 1:1-5, 14, NLT)

John's words were more than just a preface to his work, they are a clue for the reading of the entire gospel. They point the communicator to the significance and centrality of the incarnate *Logos*. The whole gospel is a fleshing out of that concept. In John's opening there is a sense of mystery and supernatural revelation. The words and images in verses 1-14 refer to this divine mystery (word, life, light, glory, grace, truth, revelation). They are words of hope and value for humanity. They connect with humanity in that they call the world to something better, something that is transformed through the *Logos*. The Word becoming flesh is foundational to the message that follows in the rest of the gospel (Beasley-Murray 5).

The first part of the passage (vss. 1-5) reveals the significant role the *Logos* plays in creation. With the use of repetition, the second verse emphasizes "(i) the Word, and none other (*οὐτος*), was with God in the beginning; (ii) that he was with God before all times and did not come into being at the 'beginning'; and (iii) the paradox of the Word who was God, and yet in fellowship with God" (Beasley-Murray 10). What is significant here is that the *Logos* is firmly established in the divine Godhead. Verses three to five

build on that by placing the divine *Logos* as the mediator of creation. The *Logos* is the mediator not only in the act of creation but also in its continuance; thus, the “light” and “life” “include “the light and life that come to man in *both* creation and new creation” (11).

While verses 6-8 speak about John the Baptist’s witness to the *Logos*, verses 9-13 give the reader some helpful understanding regarding the world’s reaction to the divine *Logos*. In these verses the reader is first introduced to the term *κοσμος*, “world.” George R. Beasley-Murray notes, “In 10a it denotes the world inhabited by humankind, in 10b the world including human beings, in 10c humanity, fallen and in darkness, yet remaining the object of the love of God (3:16)” (12). Thus, the world will be a cause of opposition. In its fallen state the world is not naturally receptive to the divine *Logos*. This discussion by John in verses 9-13 prepares the way for the significance of the *Logos* in verses 14-18.

Verses 14-18 detail the most significant part of John’s confession of the Word. The “Word became flesh” is the controlling phrase in the sentence. *γινομαι* indicates that “a person or a thing changes or enters into a new condition, becomes something that it was not before” (Beasley-Murray 13). In this phrase that is flesh. “The *Logos* in becoming *σαρξ* participated in man’s creaturely weakness (the characteristic meaning of “flesh” in the Bible)” (14). The verse goes on to say that the “Word became flesh and *made his dwelling among us* [emphasis mine]” or literally, “pitched his tent among us” (14). “The Word is the ultimate manifestation of the presence of God amongst human beings” (Rogers and Rogers 177). This manifestation is an incredible picture of the divine *Logos* taking human form and living amongst humanity.

David L. McKenna furthers the idea of the incarnation when he writes, “Jesus

Christ, the Incarnate person, did not remain isolated from the culture into which He was born. His incarnate character as well as His strategy and His task were profoundly influenced by the culture and time in which He lived” (41).

One more phrase deserves attention. Having dwelt amongst humanity, John says the glory of this divine *Logos* is “full of grace and truth” (1:14c, NIV). The dwelling had a purpose. It revealed the grace of a loving Father and the truth of redemption. Jesus Christ did not just come to be in the world, but he came with the intention of revealing God’s redemptive message of grace and truth. Thus, the incarnation is God becoming Jesus the Jew, and through Jesus bringing his message of grace and truth to a lost, lifeless, and loveless humanity.

Jesus’ very life became a model and a message of God’s love and truth. To know Jesus and understand what he is about is to grasp the heart of God. Therefore, through Jesus’ life, and not just his message, the theological underpinnings for this study are demonstrated. He came, not just to tell of God’s divine love and rule for life but to show all believers the manner in which the message is to be delivered.

Canadian Context

The research project was conducted in the Greater Vancouver region, a cosmopolitan area on the southwest coast of British Columbia, Canada. By and large, the Church in British Columbia, and thus Canada, is affected by the same ideological realities that influence the Western world, yet in many ways the differences in history, immigration, population dispersion, and religious heritage make Canada quite distinct. Christian leader and former president of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada Brian Stiller indicates the Canadian religious scene is dominated by the second largest land

mass in the world, a thinly distributed population that stretches out from east to west, a religious heritage that is largely Roman Catholic (Canada is 47 percent Catholic) and Church of England, and an ideology that is highly secular (20-21). For many Canadians, the result of being founded on two cultures (French and English), the lack of a revolution, and the effect of a relatively small population spread over a large land mass has had a significant impact on the development of Canada as a people. Adding to that a strong European influence on Canada's past, a increased immigration policy of third-world peoples, and a Canadian identity that often times is described as "anything but American," Canada is a place that is strongly pluralistic.

Canadian sociologist Donald Posterski explains this further:

For the majority of Canadians, the emerging and prevailing cultural consensus is best described by the term secular pluralism.... Canadian culture is "secular" in that most people believe, either consciously or unconsciously, that God is unnecessary for making sense out of life. And society is "pluralistic" in that people put their lives together accepting the assumption that many ways of believing and behaving are equally valid. (28)

Canada is farther down the road of pluralism and secularism than America, and that cultural milieu furthers the need for a fresh look at effective biblical preaching in our context.

Religion editor for the Vancouver Sun Douglas Todd notes that the 2001 statistic Canada census indicates a growing number of Canadians are losing their religion. The numbers show that 4.8 million Canadians, 16 percent of the population, declared themselves as having no religion. While that number is notable in itself, even more significant is the 4 percent increase from a decade earlier. In the same article Todd observes that the Greater Vancouver region is at the forefront of the national trend with

one in three residents saying they have no religion. Those figures and the large influx of Eastern religions in the last fifty years make this area a perfect picture of the Canadian mosaic.

One final observation deserves note. Researcher and sociologist Reginald W. Bibby suggests in his recent book that Canada may not be as secular as many think, at least not in the traditional way of thinking. Even though a consistent move away from organized religion has been taking place in recent decades, Bibby sees a strong spiritual hunger still evident across the country (28). People have not given up on their fascination with the mysterious, their search for the meaning of life, and for many of them they have retained a religious memory that they have carried with them since childhood. While many are decrying the times, Bibby retains a spirit of optimism suggesting that the Canadian Church just may be able to tap into the spiritual hunger and make a genuine connection into the lives of people (32).

In summary, this research project was carried out in an area that is culturally diverse, multi-faith, highly tolerant of others, and in one way or other affected by a growing secularism and yet at the same time retains some element of curiosity for the spiritual.

The Participants

The results of this study were also influenced by each of the participants and their own specific contexts for ministry. Their education varied from undergraduate degrees to master's level work. Their ministry experience varied in years of experience and cross-cultural experiences, and their congregations varied in size, ethnic orientation, and history. The participants also brought a diversity in ministry roles, from church planter to

associate pastor to senior pastor.

Part of this research project reflects the application of various ideas in my own congregation, Surrey Alliance Church. Surrey Alliance is a congregation that has an interesting forty-four year history. Originally it was a daughter church of the first Christian and Missionary Alliance church on the west coast, Tenth Avenue Alliance. Born with a missional spirit, the first two decades were noted by rapid growth and many suburban values prominent in the Canadian west. With an average attendance of 350 and a largely white, middle-class congregation, the church launched into its most aggressive building campaign in the beginning of the 1980s. A large worship auditorium with seating for 1,200+ was built. In many ways that building project marked a unique transition in the church's history.

In the years that followed, the suburban community that surrounded Surrey Alliance Church slowly changed into a lower middle class, urban community. In addition interest rates skyrocketed and a large debt followed. The church was quickly finding itself disconnected from its own community and hampered by its own internal problems. Today the church remains in one of the most significant locations in a city of over 350,000 people. It possesses a tremendous piece of property with spacious room in its buildings, boasts a young, enthusiast ministry team, and slowly is transitioning so that it can reconnect with a world and a community to which it once related well. Surrey Alliance is a church with a fairly equal displacement of age demographics, and while still predominantly white, it has a growing visible minority. The average worship attendance is 430+ each Sunday.

Purpose

The purpose of the research project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a peer mentoring preaching program (PMPP) that enabled other preachers to communicate effectively to an emerging postmodern culture. It sought to take like-minded participants through a ten-month program that introduced them to ten key qualities of biblical preaching.

The program was not an exhaustive study of all the elements of biblical preaching, but it did seek to develop ten key qualities of preaching as they relate to the present emerging postmodern culture. The first two qualities related to the understanding and exegesis of the Word, the next two qualities focused on the messenger, and the final six qualities identified various touch points with the culture. Through the program the participants were expected to be involved in reading, class discussion, field application, sermon evaluation, and an exit interview.

As the primary researcher and facilitator of the program, I endeavored further to develop my own skills in effective biblical preaching to postmoderns. Through the regular application of the principles in my own preaching, I observed the effect it had from a focus group and various anecdotal comments I received from my congregation.

Research Questions

The following research questions framed this study.

Research Question #1

What evidence can be observed in the PMPP participants that indicates they have learned over the duration of the program the effective qualities of preaching to postmoderns?

Research Question #2

What aspect of the PMPP contributed the most to the changes observed in the participants?

Research Question #3

How have people responded in my congregation as I have applied the effective principles of preaching to postmoderns?

Definitions

In this study several principle terms need defining.

Peer mentoring is a relational experience through which the mentor empowers the mentoree with the new knowledge and skill that is applicable to their ministry context.

The experience between the two persons involves the sharing of resources, interaction, and the coaching of the mentoree through a process of learned behavior.

Biblical preaching is the communication of a biblical idea that is communicated through the life of the preacher to a given audience. Haddon Robinson defines this further:

Communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers. (Biblical Preaching 30)

Emerging postmodernism is the cultural shift that is presently taking place in the Western world. Posterski explains this difficult term:

Postmodernism enters the current landscape questioning the assumptions of modernism and the previous ways of conceiving life. The belief that reason and the scientific method can provide reliable or universal foundation for knowledge is specifically questioned. For postmodernism, life is a limitless expression of human pursuits, reality is a question of personal perception, and truth is a matter of preference. (31)

Description of Project

This project developed a PMPP that effectively encouraged better preaching in the participants. The participants involved came from various backgrounds, but all shared a common passion and calling to preach. While their backgrounds, experiences, and ministry contexts differed, each of them easily met the minimum desired ministry experience of three years. The intended study was to involve no more than seven and no less than four; beside myself, four participants were involved through the whole ten months.

The initial research that laid the groundwork for the project was completed at Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, Kentucky, in the spring of 2001. The second stage of the project happened once I arrived at Surrey Alliance Church. Over the course of several months, I sought out individuals who had an interest in the program and then began to write the curriculum for the ten-month PMPP. During that period I refined and developed the “Preaching Observation Guide” (POG), which profiles the ten key qualities of effective biblical preaching as they relate to postmodern communication. The POG served as the primary observation tool both before and during the PMPP. Upon selection to the program, the participants were asked to submit one representative sermon that was measured with the POG. This pretest served as a standard for evaluation and baseline development through the program.

Beginning in September 2002, the participants were invited to meet once a month, over a ten-month period. These half-day seminars incorporated various elements that were built around the ten qualities of biblical preaching. Some of those elements were readings and audio examples from outside the class, and many were lectures, discussion

and audio and video examples that were done together in the class setting. Time was also given for feedback from their focus groups, as well as comments on their preaching.

Through the ten-month program, each of the participants submitted six sermons (five, plus the pretest), one every second month. These sermons were then evaluated with the POG, and the results shared with the individuals. Comments on these evaluations included what was done well, what was missing, and what could be improved. The assumption was that the six submitted sermons would indicate a progression of development and application of the ten key qualities.

In all, the participants were expected to submit one audio or videotaped sermon for a pretest, a sermon for evaluation every second month (for a total of five), participation in all of the ten PMPP gatherings, readings, peer support, and final evaluation.

The final expectation was involvement in an exit interview that sought to discern the strengths and weaknesses of the program and the key learning points for the participant.

In addition to my time spent giving leadership to the PMPP, I zeroed in on my own development. To that end I established a focus group within my congregation and met with them twice, leading them through a discussion-oriented evaluation of the effectiveness of my preaching. They were asked a series of open-ended questions as I tried to discern what in my preaching helped them the most, what elements of my preaching were ineffective, and what I could develop further.

As I worked through the PMPP and my own development as a preacher, I journaled observations on the growth areas (personally and in relation to the participants)

and the observed adjustments and changes that would make the PMPP better. I detailed what was happening in the life of the group with various anecdotal comments from the participants and I wrote recorded the skills and ideas that were beginning to develop in my own preaching.

Methodology

The methodology of this project is based on a qualitative research design that operates in a natural environment, namely the weekly preaching in the various contexts of the participants. The design is based on a hypothesis that suggests the understanding and acquisition of the ten key qualities of effective preaching can improve one's ability to communicate in the present postmodern environment.

The study utilized a modified time series design. The participants submitted one representative audio or video copy of their sermon before the PMPP began, and that served as a pretest. They then participated in the ten-month long PMPP and submitted one sermon for evaluation every second month for a series of five sermon evaluations following the pretest.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were volunteer participants who met the following criteria. Given the context of this study, the participants had formal biblical or theological training, a minimum of three years experience in the pastorate, a clearly articulated calling to preach, and a context where they applied their new knowledge and skill. The group, which included myself, was limited to seven, began with six, but by the fourth month had only four who then carried through to the end. They were all evangelical pastors that ranged between the ages of 25-50.

Variables

The independent variable in this study was the ten-month PMPP. The program sought to affect the ability of the participants and then measure that ability in preaching with effectiveness in the postmodern context. The dependent variable was the ability of the participants' preaching. As the PMPP was applied to the participants the assumption was that their skill and development in preaching would develop through the ten months. In addition, this study observed a number of intervening variables. These included the age, background, education, experience, and the contexts in which the participants preached. Each of these variables likely had an effect on the participants' ability, but they in no way were measured in this study.

Instrumentation

This study used three tools for the collection of data. The first tool was the Preaching Observation Guide (POG), which profiled the ten key qualities of effective preaching in the postmodern context. The POG provided a basis of evaluation for the pretest and then again in the series of five evaluations through the program. The POG included a short definition of each of the ten key qualities and then included a section to be used for evaluation. The evaluation was based on a five-point Likert scale that evaluated the evidence of each quality in the observed messages. It was an ordinal measurement scale that indicated the measure of the observed quality and then provided a static point of reference in relation to the time series design. It also indicated those qualities that were strong and those that need further development. Along with the Likert scale, the POG also included a parallel column to make notation of observed evidence corresponding to the ten key qualities.

The second tool was my own journaling. From the beginning of the selection process, through the program, and then again through the exit interviews, I journaled my observations on the various elements of the program, particularly looking for those indicators that led to effectiveness or ineffectiveness in the PMPP. In addition to my observations of the PMPP, I journaled my own experience with the PMPP and its application in my ministry.

The third and final tool was the exit interview. Upon completion of the ten-month PMPP, each of the participants went through an exit interview that sought out their own reflections of their experience plus their observations on what was particularly effective and what was ineffective in their development as preachers to postmoderns.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This project was essentially a case study that examined the ability of a select group of participants to improve their effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns. The results of the research are only generalized to those who participated. This study indicated how four people were better equipped in their ongoing desire to preach effectively in the postmodern context. No claims will be made about a wider population of preachers; the conclusions only shed light on those individuals who participated in the PMPP.

Overview of Dissertation

Chapter 2 of this work describes the cultural landscape in the Western world as it shifts from modernism to postmodernism as well as establishes the critical qualities of effective biblical preaching. The research design is presented in Chapter 3 while chapter 4 provides an analysis of the data and reports on the findings. Chapter 5 gives a summary

and interpretation of the research findings. It also offers suggestions for further development of the program.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

The gospel must always be communicated through culture. When Jesus Christ came, he came as the divine human wrapped in the clothes, customs, and language of a people from Galilee. When he began his public ministry, he spoke as both a prophet from the past and a rabbi in the present. He spoke the language of the people. It was the language of the marketplace, rooted in the images of the day and common to the first-century Jew. When the gospel is communicated, culture is not neutral. It is not a static tool that lies dormant and insignificant. Culture is the very thing that brings the redemptive message of Jesus Christ to a fragmented world. While the message remains timeless and eternal, the communication of that message is carried along in the wrappings of the culture. Darrell L. Guder et al. articulate the process of communication:

The gospel is always conveyed through the medium of culture. It becomes the good news to lost and broken humanity as it is incarnated in the world through God's sent people, the church. To be faithful to its calling the church must be contextual, that is, it must be culturally relevant within a specific setting. The church relates constantly and dynamically both to the gospel and to its contextual reality. (18)

Every culture is changing and dynamic. It has a life that is uniquely connected to a specific people. It has many local and regional forms, some which are good, some which are evil, and some that are neutral. What is critical to this study is that each cultural system must be understood on its own terms. The biblical communicator has to be able to understand the language of the people before he or she can communicate with effectiveness and clarity (Dyrness 17). Thus, the task is not only to experience the dynamic message of the gospel but also to become experts in understanding and relating to the culture.

Understanding “*Logos*” and Its Theological Relation to Biblical Preaching

The theological underpinnings for understanding the *Logos* and its relationship to biblical preaching are found in several places in the Scriptures. From the Old Testament covenant to Paul’s speech on Mars Hill, the dynamics of the divine-human interchange are wrapped in the cultural context of the day. One clear statement on this is found in the opening words of John’s gospel. There in his prologue, John introduces a phrase that carries much meaning: “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). That phrase identifies both the core of the gospel and the task of the biblical preacher. To understand the preacher’s task better, one has to look at John’s use of *Logos* and then the phrase as a whole in its context.

When John wrote his gospel near the end of the first century, he used the term *logos* at the beginning of his prologue to cast an idea that would permeate through his whole work. Generally the term means “word,” “speech,” “account,” “story,” or “message” (Johnson 481). It was a Greek word that was in common use in the first century. John used it for other reasons. Influenced by two streams of thought, the term *logos* would have likely carried with it more than its common usage for John’s listeners.

The first stream of thought dated back to the sixth century BC. Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, is first credited with using *logos* in his teachings. He taught that all things in the universe were in a state of constant change, that nothing ever remained the same. Nevertheless within this constant change, a believer could perceive an eternal ebb and flow of things in the *logos*—the eternal principle of order in the universe (Ladd 238). After Heraclitus the Stoic philosophers took the idea and used it as a foundational piece in their understanding of the universe. While they saw the gods as detached from the

world, they understood the *logos* to be the force that flowed out of the mind of the gods. For the Stoics it was the supreme principle of the universe that originated, affected, and directed all things (Beasley-Murray 10).

Another philosopher influenced by Greek thought, Philo, used the term shortly before John. He attempted to explain Judaism in terms of Greek philosophy so that he could give a rational account of the Jewish faith. In his writings he described the *logos* as the intermediary between God and his creation. It was that which gave meaning to the universe and was understood as an instrument of God in creation (Ladd 376). In sum, the first stream of thought was influenced by Greek philosophy and suggested that the *logos* is the supreme principle that gives meaning to the universe.

The second stream of thought that would have informed John's use of *logos* came from the Hebrew writings. From both the rabbinic writings to the Torah, the concept carried with it several weightier ideas that went beyond the common first-century use of the term. D. H. Johnson outlines four ideas that surrounded the Hebrew use: (1) it was a common occurrence in the Scriptures to use anthropomorphisms to show the activities of God on earth, one of which was *his word*; (2) *logos* frequently referred to wisdom; (3) it was used in relation to the Torah itself, the whole Torah being called the "Word of God"; and, (4) it was a term that when translated had similarities to the Hebrew word *dabar*, which means, word, thing, matter, speech, cause, or promise. Johnson notes that in the Jewish mind the use of *logos* would have carried with it the idea of a dynamic power that accomplishes God's work (482). Thus, in the mind of John's audience, both Jewish and Greek listener would have been familiar with the term. They may not have been fully aware of the Greek philosopher's use or the full implications of Hebrew thought, but it is

quite likely that they would have recognized the significance of the term and realized that it spoke of something supremely great in the universe (Morris 116).

While that describes the background to the term it does not clearly describe John's use of the Word. Leon Morris indicates that for John the *logos* conveyed in some ways the exact opposite of Greek philosophy. He used the term to speak of a God who was passionately involved in the universe. Morris says that "the *logos* speaks of God's coming where we are, taking our nature upon Himself, entering the world's struggles, and out of this agony winning men's salvation" (116). For John the *logos* was not a principle but the divine Being and source of life, not a personification but a Person who came to reveal light, life, and love.

Johnson notes the prologue (1:1-18) highlights three qualities about the *logos* that further clarify John's use of the term: his preexistence, his activity as an agent of creation, and his incarnation (482). Beasley-Murray suggests another quality, or maybe better, an extension of Johnson's third quality, that is, in the *logos* one observes the supreme example of the communication of the gospel. It is the ultimate revelation of the Father (17). Thus, when John used the term *logos*, he was speaking of the person of the Godhead through whom the world was created. That same person took on human nature to reveal the purposes of the Father and bring into fulfillment those same purposes so that all humanity could know real life.

Looking at the phrase John uses in verse 14, "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," there is an emphasis put on the incarnation. The word translated "to dwell" or "to pitch one's tent" is a biblical metaphor for God's presence among his people (Beasley-Murray 242). In his work on New Testament theology, George Eldon

Ladd makes an interesting assertion. In Ladd's words, "John wishes to emphasize (which is different than Philo) that it was God in the Word who entered human history, not as a phantom, but as a real man of flesh" (242).

The idea then behind John's use of the phrase "the Word became flesh" is one that while influenced by both Hebrew and Greek thought was entirely his own. He used the term to speak of the revealed message of God's salvation given in a manner that could be looked upon, related to, and experienced. It was a revelation of divine truth that crossed the greatest cultural barrier known to creation, the expanse between the divine and the human. As Morris says, "In one short, shattering expression John unveils the great idea at the heart of Christianity, that the very Word of God took flesh for man's salvation" (102).

Thus, through John's opening words in his gospel he lays an amazing foundation for the biblical communicator. On the one hand, he highlights the dynamics of the gospel message, and on the other hand, he describes God's plan for communication—a crossing of the great divide with cultural relevance.

The task then for communicators is to stand between two worlds, the world of the biblical text and the world in which they live. Yet, communicators do not just stand there, they become experts in both worlds, understanding one so that they can effectively communicate to the other. Stott suggests preachers look at the task of gospel communication as "bridge-building" (138). In becoming bridge builders preachers neither surrender to the culture nor ignore it; instead they seek to take the eternal truth of the gospel and bring it to bear on the life, the customs, and the ideology of that culture.

This task of bridge building is not easy. It has at least three inherent difficulties.

First, as ambassadors and communicators of the gospel the biblical preacher has been reared and trained in a language and a sub-culture that is all their own. They speak in biblical and theological images and definitions that mean less and less to the world around them. For many communicators, they have become protectors of the truth instead of proclaimers of the truth. As a result the culture around them has responded with militancy, irrelevance, or both. Second, the biblical preacher is not only a product of their own Christian subculture but they are products of a modern age—an age that is defined by rationalism, secularism, pluralism and individualism. The old worldview is slowly losing its moorings and giving way to a new cultural setting. While that shift is developed further in the review, what is important to understand is that this modern age has lost its foundation and is now being replaced by another emerging mind-set, namely, postmodernism. That shift leads to a third difficulty in building this bridge. The biblical communicator does not know where to build the other end of the bridge because the other side is just now coming into focus. Postmodernism has not yet reached its maturity, and in the eyes of many, is just now finding its strength.

Thus, the communication task is a daunting one. To be heard the preacher has to speak with authority from the past and understanding in the present. If communicators misread the present cultural malaise, they will remain irrelevant and ineffective, and if they become lazy in doing the hard work of grappling with the divine revelation, they will have little to offer.

With many critical elements of Western culture worthy of study, the pursuit and understanding of those elements could add up to several volumes worth of work. My purpose in this review is to understand the larger cultural shift that is happening across

North American culture, specifically as it relates to the task of preaching and communication. To understand this shift, detailed earlier as postmodernism, biblical communicators have to go back and understand exactly what is “modern,” and what is “post.”

Understanding the “Modern” in Postmodernism

In many ways the world of North America is a modern one. The political, economical, social, and religious developments have all stemmed from a common ideology. These ideas and values all found their roots in the historical intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment.

The Birth of Modernism

The roots of the Enlightenment were sowed in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, a period called the Renaissance. Spurred on by thinkers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626), the Renaissance elevated humankind to the center of reality (Grenz 2). Bacon’s vision and others like him planted the first seeds of modernism in the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

The Enlightenment barely lasted two centuries, but it dislodged a way of thinking and a view of reality that had been in place since the second century. “From Augustine to the Reformation,” says Stanley J. Grenz, “the intellectual aspects of Western civilization were dominated by theologians and theological considerations. Although differing in the details, Christian theologians all agreed that reality was an ordered whole. God stood at the apex” (61). Yet with the Enlightenment and the rise of humankind, that view of reality was lost. Grenz explains the change: “The Enlightenment permanently and radically disrupted the theological worldview created in the Middle Ages and honed by

the Reformation” (61).

With God now on the sidelines, humanity moved to the center. Previously the role of divine revelation was central to knowledge and human perspective, yet when that relationship was discarded a new belief in the intellectual and moral abilities of humanity began to rise:

Enlightenment thinkers began to appeal to human reason rather than externally imposed revelation as the final arbiter of truth. ... Proponents of the Age of Reason contended that people should no longer blindly accept the “superstitions” proclaimed by external authorities, such as the Bible or the church. Instead, they should dispassionately employ reason to systematize the data of sensory experience and follow reason wherever it would lead. (Grenz 62)

The Critical Elements of Modernism

This monumental shift from tradition and divine revelation to human reason and logic left several marks on the modern age. These marks affected the way humanity perceived reality from that point forward. Grenz details five elements.

First, as mentioned, these major shifts of philosophy and understanding *sought to elevate reason over superstition*. Thus, this era appropriately became known as the Age of Reason (Grenz 69). God and divine revelation no longer took precedence. Instead, humanity’s ability to perceive, think, and order its perceptions were all that were needed. René Descartes (1596-1650) was the father of the modern emphasis on reason. His famous line was, “I think, therefore I am” (Webber 19). Descartes believed that truth was naturally innate within the human mind. He, and others like him, focused primarily on trying to employ the principles of rational logic to discover these self-evident truths (Guder et al. 22). With this elevation of reason, other forms of thought were marginalized, such as imagination, intuition, pattern recognition, and systems thinking

(McLaren 17).

Second, the Enlightenment looked at the world as a *natural world*. The belief was that everything in the universe was governed by natural laws. While many still believed a Grand Designer was behind those laws, true perception of reality would be found by discovering those laws (Grenz 68).

Third, the Age of Reason led to the *autonomous self*. Humanity's ability to reason was supreme. People "were increasingly disinclined to rely solely on the dictates of ancient authorities.... Individuals became increasingly bold in testing all such external claims to authority" (Grenz 69). As this shift away from ancient authorities emerged, the autonomous self became the ultimate authority for life (Webber 18).

Fourth, Enlightenment thinkers believed the universe has an overarching order; that within the entire universe was an ordered *harmony* (Grenz 69).

Finally, the Enlightenment was marked by a belief in *progress*. "Building on the work of René Descartes and others, thinkers in the Age of Reason were convinced that because the universe was both orderly and knowable, the use of the proper methods could lead to true knowledge" (Grenz 70). With this emphasis on progress was a feeling of anticipation and hope. Humanity was being liberated from an old, subpar worldview. As Carl F. H. Henry says, "Secular science promised a new freedom for humanity and progress for the planet. The intellectual order of the world was relocated in human reasoning. This control over nature and history would free humankind from life and a predetermined universe" (36).

Grenz offers a thorough summary:

The modern, post-Enlightenment mind assumes that knowledge is certain, objective, and good. It presupposes that the rational, dispassionate self can

obtain such knowledge. It presupposes that the knowing self peers at the mechanistic world as a neutral observer armed with the scientific method. The modern knower engages in the knowing process believing that knowledge inevitably leads to progress and that science coupled with education will free humankind from our vulnerability to nature and all forms of social bondage. (81)

In A New Kind of Christian, Brian D. McLaren provides another overview of modernism. He describes this era with the following ten characteristics. First, modernism was an era of conquest and control. Nature was conquered, native peoples were conquered, and a thousand human maladies were conquered. “As a result, modern people have dedicated themselves to controlling people, results, risks, economies, experiments, profit margins, variables, nature, even weather” (16).

Second, the modern era is characterized by the machine. McLaren notes, “Mechanization was the unspoken goal of the modern world” (16).

Third, it was an age of analysis. McLaren uses this analogy to explain:

If the universe is an intelligible machine—and science is the master screwdriver to take it apart—then analysis is the ultimate form of thought, the universal screwdriver. By taking wholes or effects apart into smaller and smaller parts and causes, each of which becomes understandable, analysis renders the universe both knowable and controllable. (16)

Fourth, it was the age of secular science. With the emphasis on mechanization and science God was pushed out of the discovery (McLaren 17).

Fifth, it was an age aspiring to absolute objectivity. McLaren noted, “Absolute objectivity would yield absolute certainty and knowledge” (McLaren 17).

Sixth, it was a critical age. In a time when everything was analyzed, detailed, discussed and debated. If proposed ideas did not win then they lost (McLaren 17).

Seventh, it was the age of the modern nation-state and organization. McLaren says, “Since the collapse of the medieval world, modernity has been the story of

organization and reorganization, from the assembly line to the picket line to the party line” (McLaren 18).

Eighth, the modern era was characterized by individualism. The move was from “we” to “me” (McLaren 18).

Ninth, it was the age of Protestantism and institutionalized religion (McLaren 18).

Tenth, the modern era was an age of consumerism. “The market economy led to freedom from the feudal system, but it has become a powerful lord in its own right” (McLaren 18). With the individual at the center of the universe, the pursuit of happiness became a right achieved through consumption.

McLaren concludes his overview with this statement:

[W]hatever postmodernism philosophy is, it is still in its infancy. Defining it is premature. Just as modernism took nearly two centuries to find its full expression in Enlightenment rationalism,... we're at least a few decades from anything close to a mature expression of postmodern philosophy.... It takes some time for the phase that deconstructs the prevailing view to give way to a phase where a new view is articulated, a new vision is proposed. (19)

Impact on North American Culture

The effect of all this understanding of the universe has had a significant impact on society. People became consumers and capitalists. They began to derive their identity from what they achieved and where they were placed in society. They believed technology and technique were tools used for the pursuit of progress. Driven by science and rational thought society believed the new was always better than the old, efficiency was always a step towards effectiveness, and every problem has a solution (Guder et al. 27-29).

The Age of Reason also brought about a change in the way Western society

viewed Christian faith and theology. The leading thinkers of the Enlightenment differentiated between two types of religion—*natural* and *revealed*. Natural religion “involved a set of foundational truths (typically believed to include the existence of God and a body of universally acknowledged moral laws) to which all human beings were presumed to have access through the exercise of reason” (Grenz 71). Revealed religion were those elements of faith that detailed specific Christian doctrines. Grenz summarizes the eventual effect: “As the Age of Reason unfolded, revealed religion increasingly came under attack, and natural religion increasingly gained status of true religion” (72).

The eventual effect of this differentiation was the loss of true Christian faith and theology in the public arena. Faith was relegated to the private arena where speculation and opinion were the norm. No one man’s or woman’s faith was any more or less credible than the next. The values and value systems around which they built their lives were neither right nor wrong. Each person was free to live the way they want. In the public arena there remained the “facts.” With the facts people “argue, experiment, carry out tests, and compare results, until we finally agree on what the facts are; and we expect all reasonable people to accept them” (Newbiggin 16).

In addition to the loss of true Christian faith and theology from the public arena, the heightening of the autonomous self and the ability to reason has left the individual alone. Community has been lost and self has been left “disconnected and hanging in midair.... Not surprisingly, never have [individuals] felt so alienated and isolated” (McLaren 18).

The Enlightenment project has been challenged and in its wake is an emerging ideology that is a reaction to modernism. Modernism still casts a long shadow on the

present, but there was dawning a new age filled with ideas and values that react against and go where modernism could not take our present world.

Understanding What Is “Post” about Postmodernism

In his Primer on Postmodernism, Grenz is most helpful in detailing some of the emerging effects of postmodernism. Grenz notes that the term *postmodernism* was likely first coined in the 1930s to refer to a major historical transition that was already under way. It took root first in architecture, then moved into academic circles, and later surfaced as a way of understanding the broader cultural shifts that were taking place (2).

Postmodernism Defined

At its very core, postmodernism is a rejection of modernity. It is *post*-modern. Whatever that “post” may mean at its simplest level, it is what comes after modernity. McLaren provides some insight on this transition:

[T]o be postmodern doesn't imply being antimodern or nonmodern, and it is certainly different from being premodern.... To be postmodern means to have experienced the modern world and to have been changed by the experience—changed to such a degree that one is no longer modern. (16)

Grenz offers a more detailed definition:

Postmodernism refers to an intellectual mood and an array of cultural expressions that call into question the ideals, principles, and values that lay at the heart of the modern mind-set. Postmodernity, in turn, refers to an emerging epoch, the era in which we are living, the time when the postmodern outlook increasingly shapes our society. Postmodernity is the era in which postmodern ideas, attitudes, and values reign—when postmodernism molds culture. It is the era of the postmodern society. (12)

As this ideology emerges the initial outlook is largely negative. Society is now pessimistic towards the idea of progress. “Postmoderns have not sustained the optimism that characterized previous generations.... For the first time in history, the emerging generation does not share the conviction of their parents that the world is becoming a

better place in which to live” (Grenz 13). In addition to pessimism, postmoderns see life here on earth as very fragile. Society has not done well in coexisting with its environment or in managing its natural resources, and for the first time in centuries the survival of the human race is not an easily assumed conclusion (13).

Even more significant is the understanding that the postmodern mind suggests truth is beyond reason. While modernity viewed truth as a natural development of reason and logic, postmoderns “look beyond reason to nonrational ways of knowing, conferring heightened status on emotions and intuition” (Grenz 14). Another critical aspect that has been a rejection of modernity is the value postmoderns place on community and the social dimensions of existence. Life finds value and meaning as it is connected to community. The individual is not autonomous but needs the input of those around him or her. Because of that need for input, truth and meaning become an expression of a specific community. Grenz details this idea further:

In this sense postmodern truth is relative to the community in which a person participates. And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths. Most postmoderns make the leap of believing that this plurality of truth can exist alongside one another. The postmodern consciousness, therefore, entails a radical kind of relativism and pluralism. (14)

This shift towards radical relativism and pluralism points to the fact that postmodernism no longer has “any common standards to which people can appeal in their efforts to measure, judge, or value ideas, opinions, or lifestyle choices” (Grenz 19). Life is centerless. Society has no objective standard platform by which it can view the world.

In the end, whatever postmodernism is, it is helpful to restate McLaren’s words. Postmodernism is still in its infancy; it is only just emerging on the scene (19). McLaren describes this movement from one era to another with another transition that happened at

the beginning of the last century. If someone was to look back to the year 1910 and ask what was the most reliable form of transportation, they would have said the automobile. Yet in 1910 automobiles were notoriously undependable. Not only that, there were no good roads for them to ride on, and there were not any gas stations around. So if someone needed good, reliable transportation, they would not have bought a car, they would have bought a horse and buggy. Right at the moment when a new era in transportation was emerging, the old era was never as strong as it was then. The best buggies were being built at that time (43).

This transition from modernism to postmodernism is slow and, at times, difficult to pinpoint. On many fronts the realities of modernism are easily identifiable, but the shift and slow emergence of another era is increasingly becoming evident.

Understanding the Major Shift

In order to get a better handle on postmodernism, one has to explore what is holding up this nebulous ideology. In its rejection of modernity, Grenz says, postmoderns have no worldview: “[T]hey are content to simply speak of many views and, by extension, many worlds” (40). Here are the major elements of this postmodern shift.

First, postmodernism rejects the notion of objectivity and replaces it with the idea of constructionism. Foundational to the modern worldview is the assumption that the world around us is knowable. Human reason and the uniformity of the universe give humanity the ability to know their world. Postmodernism rejects that idea. It suggests the world is not something to be observed and discovered as much as it is a place that is interpreted and constructed. Individuals bring their own interpretations to a reality that is rooted in personal identity, time and space. Grenz summarizes this point:

The postmodern understanding of knowledge, therefore, is built on two foundational assumptions: (1) postmoderns view all explanations of reality as constructions that are useful but not objectively true, and (2) postmoderns deny that we have the ability to step outside our constructions of reality. (43)

As a result of those two assumptions Grenz indicates that a different conclusion is important to the postmodern mind:

Postmoderns have adopted a pluralistic view of knowledge. Having rejected the notion of a single objective world.... they have demonstrated a willingness to allow competing and seemingly conflicting constructions to exist side by side. The point at issue for them is not "*Is the proposition or theory correct?*" but rather "*What does it do?*" or "*What is its outcome?*" [emphasis mine]" (43)

In addition, Robert E. Webber observes that with the rejection of objectivity and analysis a new scientific posture has emerged that is much more holistic and open. Webber writes, "[W]hile our picture of the world was at one time that of a vast collection of individualized particles, externally related but essentially independent, the new revolution in physics argues for a dynamic and interrelated world" (21). He adds, "[I]t is now recognized, even in science, that one needs to bring to 'fact' a framework of thought that is based on faith. The assumption that there is no God is a faith-commitment as much as the assumption that there is a God" (21).

Second, postmodernism rejects the claim of the "metanarrative," the idea that one defining narrative defines reality. In the modern worldview, the belief was that humanity could discover the fundamental "laws" of the universe. These laws gave understanding and meaning to life and when brought together formulated a larger narrative that brought everything together and moved everything forward. The belief was that this *metanarrative* gave a basis for technological innovation and human progress (Grenz 44-45).

Postmoderns reject this concept. Universal truth is not credible for the postmodern. The idea of a grand narrative is not considered credible. As a result the world consists of numerous little “mini-” narratives, experiences, and interpretations that are weighed one against the other.

The Critical Marks of Contemporary Postmodern Society

This present shift from modernism to postmodernism has left some obvious (and some not so obvious) marks on North American culture. Some are remnants of modernism but have been given their own postmodern twist. Others are a reaction against modernity and are just now coming into focus. This overview is by no means inclusive of everything that could be said on the subject, but it does present the critical marks of the present age.

Secular Yet Spiritual

One of the great effects that modernity had on Western society was the moving of God from the public to the private sphere. God became boxed into the personal arena of values and opinions. David Wells says, “[S]ecularism strips life of the divine, but it is important to see that it does so by relocating the divine in that part of life which is private” (79). The effect of this loss is that society’s public life finds no direction of justification in the divine. The public square, as Richard Neuhaus argues, is “naked,” stripped of its old values (78-93) and, therefore, has no unifying center, no core values, that gives direction to society as a whole (81). The result, then, is a God irrelevant to society (Henderson 123).

What is particularly significant is that while North Americans believe in God, they do not take him seriously (Henderson 123). For them, God is not a factor in their

business, their decisions, or their homes. In his book, Culture of Disbelief, Stephen L. Carter argues that American culture fails to provide a place for God or for those who take God seriously. The message culture gives is, “Pray if you like, worship if you must, but whatever you do, don’t on any account take your religion seriously” (15).

David W. Henderson says secularism has had three effects on culture’s relationship (or lack thereof) with God. First, God is distant (128). He created the universe as humanity has come to know it but from that point on he left it to itself. God became nothing more than a distant grandfather-nice to think about but irrelevant to everyday life. From a theological perspective, this view was given the name of deism. Second, culture has come to view God as absent (128). The universe is a closed system. The Bible and divine authority is nothing more than the construction of a certain segment of humanity. This philosophy is called naturalism and the result is a loss of the supernatural. Third, God is compartmentalized. This means God has been relegated to the private arena. As Carter describes this shift, “The message of contemporary culture seems to be that it is perfectly all right to believe that stuff—we have no freedom of conscience, people can believe what they like—but you really ought to keep it to yourself” (24).

Mixed into that secularism is also a deep yearning for spiritual truth (Dockery 13). This spiritual yearning is one of the reasons why putting a finger on the pulse of contemporary society is hard to do. With the rejection of modernism comes a new desire for the supernatural. Segments of society—particularly the young—are looking to the supernatural, pondering the mysteries and seeking Eastern spirituality. George G. Hunter III defines this interesting contrast:

Many secular people today are religious seekers, and virtually all people are seekers in some seasons of their lives. Newsweek’s theme issue on

“The Search for the Sacred: America’s Quest for Spiritual Meaning,” reports that the religious quest has increased in recent years; that “now it’s suddenly OK, even chic, to use the S words—soul, sacred, spiritual sin.” The phenomenon is so widespread that “seekers fit no particular profile,” but people now are about as likely to look outside the Christian tradition as inside it—or to “pick and choose” from two or more religions. (20)

David S. Dockery adds this observation:

Contemporary spiritual hunger is evident in the bright colors or major displays at bookstores across the country. Books such as *Finding God on a Train*, *Conversations with God*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul* are just a few of the dozens of titles to be found. (14)

Truth Is Relative

Relativism reigns in Western society. The concept of a moral being standing guiding society is foreign. McLaren makes this observation:

No one belief has superiority over the others.... [I]f you pinned it to the ground and forced a confession of faith.... I think it would say that since no one can prove anything one way or other, you can choose whatever belief you want as long as you accept others’ rights to do the same. (126)

Guder et al. explain the effect of relativism:

Claims of objectivity and appeals to factuality are now qualified by context, whether in regard to the chemist working in a laboratory or the biblical scholar working in a library of ancient texts.... The relative character of our knowing does not necessarily mean that we cannot know God or truth. It does mean, however, that we need to accept that our understanding of truth is always an interpretation relative to our context and cultural understanding. (40)

With no sense of objective truth, society has lost its moorings and its only recourse is to rely on self. James W. Sire notes that this concept of relative truth plays itself out in a number of nuances. Some will say, “All religions boil down to the same thing,” or “It’s true for you, but it’s not true for me,” or perhaps, “No religion can claim to be true; nothing is certain” (48-65).

One of the results of this loss of objective truth is the struggle Western society has

in deciding what is right and wrong. Society is at odds when it comes to making an agreeable decision when there are two opposing views. This tension is an issue in the schools, the home, and the marketplace. Henderson calls it the “grey terrain of morality” (157).

Western society is secular yet yearns for the spiritual. Belief is identifiable, but it always has to coexist with other compelling and mutually exclusive beliefs.

Decentered Self

Along with the secular yearning for the spiritual, and the desire to believe something only as long as it can coexist with what others believe, culture has lost its center. The Enlightenment held high the human ideal, humanity was able to discern the natural world, conquering the most difficult dilemmas and facing the biggest challenges. With modernity on the downside, self has lost its security. Guder et al. say, “When ‘god’ died in the equation of modernity, it was only a matter of time before the modern self would also expire” (41). The result of this death has left the individual drifting through life with no sense of meaning or understanding of purpose. Deep down in the heart two questions remain unanswered, “Why am I here?” and, “what’s the meaning of my life?”

One of the voices of Generation X, Douglas Coupland, picks up these haunting questions in his book, Life After God. “Sometimes I think the people to feel the saddest for are people who are unable to connect with the profound” (50). People are hungry to fill the deep void within. They are longing for something more, something beyond themselves, something that would make their lives unique.

Individualism

While humanity has lost its center it still remains highly individualistic (McLaren

18). This individualism has affected everything. Unlike other cultures “we act as if each of us were entirely on our own, as if each of us were solely in control of our destiny” (Sire 76). On the positive side, individualism values the life and uniqueness of every member of society. It limits the value of any one group over another within society. On the negative side, individualism has skyrocketed the rights and freedoms of the individual over the rest of society. Everyone is out to get what he or she deserves. Marriage is okay only as long as it fulfills someone’s needs. Whatever one feels right about doing is perfectly satisfactory (87). Because of that people rarely take a close look at their lives. They choose not to evaluate their choices and actions. Individualism also promotes the natural human penchant for selfishness, greed, and pettiness (87).

Pluralism

Along with the disappearance of objective truth, the exaltation of the individual has been the greatest contributor to pluralism in North American culture. Guder et al. detail the development of this disappearance:

The function of community within the social order is changing. The context of modernity, with its philosophy of individualism and personal freedom, assumed that persons shared some sense of communal identity. This condition no longer exists for most people as a primary framework for understanding life. The structures that previously shaped such community have eroded. With this erosion, persons find themselves very alone. In this context, individualism is not so much a choice people make as a condition forced upon them. (43)

The communal aspect of society has been torn apart. People are fragmented. They group together in natural affinity groups but generally those groups are weakly connected. People lack face-to-face community and genuine connectedness (Guder et al. 43).

These five elements—secular spiritualism, relative truth, decentered self,

individualism and pluralism—have left their mark on society. Caught in the shift between modernity to postmodernity people are left with a culture that is fragmented, disillusioned, lonely, and struggling for identity. The present situation is ripe for a message of hope.

Understanding the Qualities of Effective Biblical Preaching

The challenge for biblical communicators is not easy. They are called to bring the truth to bear into the hearts and minds of a society that is resistant to outside authority. They seek to be relevant with the Word of God, yet they risk the chance of going too far in their effort towards being effective. The challenge is both real and difficult.

David W. Henderson says that anytime the preacher tries to preach with effectiveness and clarity he or she “walk[s] the narrow ledge of relevance” (20). If they go over the ledge then they accommodate the integrity of the message or miss the ears of the audience. Either the message is misrepresented or the message does not hit the target. Either way, both miss the mark. Henderson identifies the ledge:

Relevance is standing on a masonry ledge and bridging the gap between heaven and earth, doing our best not to lose sight of either the lightning bolt about to strike at our left hand or the sports car about to speed by our right. We’re working to communicate the relevance of the Bible to contemporary culture without compromising our message on the one hand, or compromising our audience on the other. (36)

The Task of Communication

The goal of relevant preaching, then, is to gain a hearing. The preacher tries to compel the listener to hear the word, to weigh it, and then to respond it. “We can’t make people believe God’s Word, or make them live it, but we can encourage them to listen to it, to take it seriously, and to weigh its claims and promises” (Henderson 37). If preachers are going to help people listen they have to be effective communicators.

In reviewing traditional models of preaching in recent decades, Calvin Miller says the style of communication has failed to reflect the change in society (36). Audiences have become much more image-saturated and entertainment oriented, and that has made them much more image-conscious and narrative in their thinking (37). Miller suggests three critical questions that have to be asked in preparing for preaching:

1. What will be heard in the audio document?
2. What will be seen in the video document?
3. How can the audio and video blend together to create an existential encounter? (38).

If the preacher can think of his or her sermon as the combination of audio and video, then he or she will be effective in preaching to the everyday person in the marketplace. “The marketplace sermon will answer the ears with saving words and the eyes with healing images” (39).

The Qualities of Effective Preaching to Postmoderns

In reviewing this postmodern milieu, several qualities begin to emerge in the relationship between postmodernism and biblical preaching. The following is delineated from the literature. The first three qualities are the irreducible minimums of any form of biblical preaching. Derived directly from Scripture, historically they create a solid foundation: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit empowered. The next seven are important but tied specifically to the present situation of preaching within the shifting cultural context. They represent the incarnational side of preaching.

Quality 1: biblically based preaching. Every biblical preacher communicates with some measure of authority. A key foundation is understanding where their authority

comes from when they bring the Word of God to bear on the hearts and lives of their audience. The core of that foundation lies in the apostle Paul's words to Timothy: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). Paul understood that the source of the holy Scriptures makes them valuable to the human context. G. Campbell Morgan points to the historical precedent set by those who have gone before the contemporary preacher:

[T]he Apostles declared the Word, as Truth is in Jesus; the Prophets were burdened with the Word of God; the Evangelists heralded the great Evangel; the Pastors and Teachers gathered the souls won from the prevailing darkness and death, and shepherded and instructed them in the Wisdom of God. (161)

All preaching must rest solidly on the Scriptures.

This high value on the Word moves the preacher towards careful exegesis. John Piper says the authority of preaching "rises and falls with our manifest allegiance to the text of Scripture" (41). If the biblical communicator views Scripture as a good moral book, or a collection of insightful wisdom for everyday life, the listener will glean over the pages and pick out what "seems" to connect. That is a different picture from the preacher who bunkers down in his or her study and does the hard work of exegesis. The great preachers of the past, such as G. Campbell Morgan, Henry Jowett, C. H. Spurgeon, and Alexander Maclaren, were men of the Word. MacLaren places a high value on the God's Word with these comments:

The preacher who has steeped himself in the Bible will have a clearness of outlook which will illuminate many dark things, and a firmness of touch which will breed confidence in him among his hearers. He will have the secret of perpetual freshness, for he cannot exhaust the Bible.... Our sufficiency is in God, and God's sufficiency will be ours in the measure in which we steadfastly follow out the purpose of making our preaching truly biblical. (7)

Again I turn to Morgan to underline this point. “Preaching,” he says, “is not the proclamation of theory, or the discussion of a doubt.... *Preaching is the Word, the truth as the truth has been revealed* [emphasis mine]” (qtd. in Walls).

In the desire to be true to the biblical text the biblical communicator must seek to understand the history, language, and culture of the ancient text. The preacher studies hard to grapple with the author’s intended purpose, asking about the first audience and the issues being addressed. David Walls adds that the type of preaching that best does this is traditional expository preaching. To exposit the Word means the preacher explains, makes clear and sets forth the meaning of that Word. Walls goes on to delineate seven primary characteristics of expository preaching:

1. It is based on a passage in the Bible, either long or short;
2. It seeks to learn the primary meaning of the passage;
3. It relates the meaning to the context of the passage;
4. It digs down for the timeless, universal truths stemming out of this passage;
5. It organizes these truths tightly around one central theme;
6. It uses the rhetorical elements of explanation, argument, illustration and application to bring the truth of the passage home to the learner; and
7. It seeks to persuade the listener to obey the passage discussed.

This idea of biblically based preaching goes further than just recognizing the Word as the foundation. It suggests that the Word of God is still speaking today. The Word is living as it is preached. This living reality is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote to the church in Thessalonica:

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of

men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thess. 2:13, NIV)

Stott explains this foundational base further with these words:

We give the impression that he who spoke centuries ago is silent today; and that the only word we can hear from him comes out of a book, a faint echo from the distant past, smelling strongly of the mold of libraries. But no, this is not all we believe. Scripture is far more than a collection of ancient documents in which the words of God are preserved. It is not a kind of museum in which God's Word is exhibited behind glass like a relic or fossil. On the contrary, it is a *living word to a living people from a living God, a contemporary message for the contemporary world* [emphasis mine]. (97)

The first principle (and irreducible minimum) for effective biblical preaching is rooting the message to the Word and allowing that divine revelation to be the authority of that which is communicated.

Quality 2: Christ-centered preaching. One of the incredible opportunities the shifting culture affords the biblical preacher is the opportunity to share the redemptive story of salvation. The world may deny the metanarrative (which is the larger unifying story) but given an opportunity to preach the biblical communicator has *the* most significant and life-transforming message to share. That message becomes clear when the preacher sees the redemptive work of God intercept the lives of ordinary men and women in the pages of the Bible.

In his book, Christ-Centered Preaching, Bryan Chapell underlines a critical insight in the quest for effective biblical preaching. He believes every sermon must tap into the over-arching theme of the Scripture, the redemption of humanity. He calls this the "Fallen Condition Focus (FCF)" (40). He defines the FCF as "the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage" (42). When the communicator discovers

the mutual condition they look for the critical element that touches the deep human need in both the ancient and contemporary audiences. Chapell explains how to determine the FCF by asking three questions:

1. What does the text say?
2. What concern(s) did the text address (in its context)?
3. What do listeners share in common with those to (or about) whom it was

written and/or the one by whom it was written?

Chapell offers a significant insight towards “fleshing out” the message of the divine revelation. His principle—the Fallen Condition Focus—taps into the truth of John

1. The preacher communicates a redemptive message of truth and grace that only comes alive when the listeners are made alive in Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 10:10).

Quality 3: Spirit-empowered preaching. The third principle again touches a foundational truth that is rooted in the source of divine revelation. If the message is one that has ultimately come from God, literally “God breathed,” according to Paul (2 Tim. 3:16), then preachers need to seek his power if they are going to understand, communicate, and hope for life change through their preaching. All preaching needs the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the divine communicator (Azurdia 35). As the third part of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit teaches believers all the things of God and enables them to remember everything that Jesus has said (John 14:26). He gives witness to Jesus (John 15:26-27). He convicts the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8), and he will guide the seeker into all truth (John 16:13-14).

In John 14, Jesus says, “And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another

Counsellor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth” (vss. 16-17, NIV). The emphasis here in Jesus’ words is not so much the nature of the Spirit as the unique action of the Spirit. When biblical communicators draw upon the rest of the New Testament they see that the Holy Spirit superintends the writing of God’s revelation and serves as the illuminator and the counselor of that Word. His role as divine communicator is fundamental to the whole process of preaching.

Piper says that this principle ought to move preachers to a feeling of desperation before God (37). When they come before the text and realize the incredible task—the challenge of understanding, processing, and communicating the divine revelation—they are made aware of their own inability. The key, Piper says, is to acknowledge this dependence in prayer. “The goal of preaching is utterly dependent on the mercy of God for its fulfillment. Therefore, the preacher must labor to put his preaching under the divine influence by prayer” (98). Practically preachers work through the following steps in their preparation:

1. Admit helplessness before God—John 15:5,
2. Pray for help—Psalm 50:15,
3. Trust in the specific promise for that hour—God is a good God—Psalm 40:17,
4. Act in confidence that God will fulfill his Word, and
5. Thank God (41).

Arturo G. Azurdia also identifies the fallenness that is within preachers. In words similar to Piper’s, he says this fallen nature has created a dilemma for preachers: “[They are] possessed by a holy compulsion [to preach] but hobbled by human inability” (29). The conclusion, then, is that preachers must seek to minister through the power of the

Spirit. All work that is transformational is going to ultimately be the work of the Holy Spirit.

These first three principles provide a critical foundation for effective biblical preaching. No matter what the context or goal, without a resolute belief in these three, the bridge to the postmodern world will be unstable. The next seven principles have particular relevance to crossing the gap from the ancient text to the contemporary postmodern culture (Webb).

Quality 4: authenticity in the preacher. In his teaching on classical rhetoric, Aristotle, first distinguished the three elements of every persuasive message: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*. *Logos* is the verbal content of the message including its craft and logic. *Pathos* is the emotional features of the sermon including passion, fervor, and the feeling the speaker conveys, as well as what the listeners experience. *Ethos* is the perceived character of the speaker, which is determined most significantly by the concern expressed for the listener's welfare. Chapell refers to these as the words (*logos*), the depth of conviction (*pathos*), and the way we live (*ethos*) (25-26). This third element is what is important here.

Brooks' definition reminds us that preaching is truth poured through the personality of the preacher. Chapell suggests a biblical precedence for this in the apostle Paul's preaching:

For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as men approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel.... As apostles ... we loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well. (1 Thess. 2:3-4, 6, 8, NIV)

Do your best to present yourself to god as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

(2 Tim. 2:4-5, NIV)

In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned. (Tit. 2:7-8, NIV)

Kevin G. Ford teaches that in the process of communication the biblical communicator cannot separate the message from the medium. “The medium is not neutral. It alters, affects and even becomes the message” (68). He goes on to say that this close association of the message with the medium means the preacher needs to be authentic in his faith and life. “Integrity is the key to effective witnessing” (70). In their classic book on leadership, The Leadership Challenge, James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner echo the words of Ford:

What we have found in our investigation of admired leadership qualities is that more than anything, people want leaders who are credible.... Above all else, we must be able to believe in our leaders. We must believe that their word can be trusted, that they’ll do what they say. (32)

They add this succinct line: “If you don’t believe in the messenger, you won’t believe in the message” (33).

Several indicators need to be part of preachers’ message and life. First, they need to listen to people. They need to understand where people are—their hurts, fears, challenges and joys. Second, they have to be real themselves. Ford says the younger generation are not only tired of the false images they see in society they are highly suspicious of fakes and anyone who wants to exploit them (70). That means the preacher has to allow the Word to speak from their own lives. Wiersbe and Wiersbe suggest preachers must never allow themselves to become the theme of the message but they must allow their lives to be a part of the message (103).

Quality 5: relevance. In one way relevance is naturally tied to authenticity. If

preachers do not listen to their audience, they will not be relevant to real life. Missiologist Charles H. Kraft observes, “[T]he first thing we learn concerning God’s strategy is that God is receptor-oriented, seeking to reach his receptors by entering their frame of reference, by participating in their life [sic]” (25).

Relevance is connecting with life. It is bringing the truth of God’s Word to bear on real life. Henderson indicates two things are needed for relevance. First, whatever is said needs to be pertinent to a person’s life. It has to address the issues they are wrestling with, answer the questions that they are asking, and meet their needs. Second, something is really not relevant unless it holds value for someone. If a person cannot make the connection between what is being said and why it will make a difference to them then it will not be relevant (24).

Relevance spills over into the preacher’s application of the biblical truth. The preacher looks at the audience’s needs, fears, and life situations. They look at some of the macro issues confronting them: world peace, terrorism, employment, nationalism, social concerns. They look at the micro issues: family, marriage, relationships, spirituality, sin. Then they apply the biblical truth from their own life context. Robinson says this challenge of application is the likely the biggest question facing the preacher (“Biblical Preaching”).

Communicators need to involve their listeners in their message if they are going to be relevant. Miller suggests that the earlier and the more often a preacher involves his listeners the better (64). Gregg and Ralph L. Lewis observe that this idea of involvement was the basic practice of Jesus in his teaching. Wherever he goes he tells stories, asks questions, uses objects, and creates dialogue. He speaks about the obvious and talks about

what lies beneath the surface of the heart. He addresses specific needs and is always ready for a variety of topics (36).

Quality 6: relationally based preaching. One of the great outcomes of rabid individualism is a society that has become isolated and disconnected. People are lone rangers—guarded, misunderstood, lonely, and isolated. To answer this tendency towards isolation and loneliness the preacher needs to amplify the beauty of authentic Christian community.

A guarded and lost society requires that biblical communicators approach people with the gospel in the context of relationship. In order for them to do that they need to expose the pain of selfishness and isolation and point to the value of relationship (Henderson 118). Leonard Sweet points out that the two favorite words in the context of the Web are “connected” and “community.” “In fact,” he notes, “the two words have become one in the new word *connexity*. Both eBay and Amazon.com say they are in the ‘connexity’ business—making connections and building communities” (109).

Bibby notes that the top four valued goals for Canadians are freedom, family life, love, and friendship (106). Three out of those four values are about relationship.

The great encouragement in all this discussion on relationships is found in the message itself. The gospel is about relationship. Ultimately, it is about a unique relationship of intimacy and communion with God that moves along the path with others. Jesus says the Great Commandment is a willingness to display love for others and to lay one’s life down for friends (John 15:12-14). The key, then, is to incorporate this relational quality in the preaching task by exposing the inner pain and emptiness of people’s isolated lives and to heighten the joy that is found in Christian love and

relationships.

Quality 7: solution-oriented preaching. H. Norman Wright says that people today are looking for solutions. Instead of focusing on what is wrong in their lives, they need to focus on what is right. They need to be brought to a place of hope. People need to hear that the message pastors preach is connected to real life. They need to know that God accepts them the way they are but loves them too much to leave them that way.

One of the great opportunities this cultural malaise gives is the chance to speak to the disconnected and broken lives of the world. The biblical communicator has a message of redemption and hope. This hope brings solutions to felt needs, but even more, it brings solution to the great human needs. Jesus says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10, NIV). Solutions that are kingdom oriented, answers that are rooted in Christ, they bring people hope.

The task, then, is to preach in such a way that questions are answered, needs are touched, and hearts are moved further towards Jesus Christ.

Quality 8: multisensory or experiential preaching. In his book, Post-Modern Pilgrims, Leonard Sweet observes that people live in a multisensory world. They want to experience their world. The messages and images that come through the media are sensory laden. Purchasing something on eBay is not just an economical transaction but an experience in wanting, gambling, and pursuing something (31). “Moderns,” says Sweet, “want to figure out what life’s about. Postmoderns want to experience what life is, especially experience life for themselves” (32).

A quick look at the messages that are being sent from the culture reveals some interesting characteristics. Television is bringing an onslaught of “reality-based”

experiences. To keep its “experiences” fresh, The Gap introduces a new product line every six to eight weeks (Sweet 34). Recreational Equipment Incorporated’s (REI) flagship store in Seattle looks more like a retail amusement park than a store. One of the country’s largest wilderness sports stores (one hundred thousand square feet, sixty thousand stock items), the consumer cooperative. REI boasts places for customers to interact with and experience some of the products they are selling—a seven-story climbing wall, a three hundred foot waterfall, a four hundred and seventy five foot-long biking trial and test track, a hundred seat café, a rain room for testing how waterproof the Leak-Tex is, or a lab where camp stoves can be tested. Consider BMW’s marketing of their *3 Series* cars: “Engineering. Science. Technology. All worthless ... unless they make you feel something” (35).

Sweet says that culture literally “feels” its way through life. If the preacher wants to connect with society then they will have to allow their audience to both “feel” and “think.” Effective preachers today do not “write” their sermons he says, they “create total experiences” (43).

Quality 9: image-based preaching. Culture is driven by images. Turn on the television or jump onto the Internet and people will be exposed to a thousand images all vying for their attention. Sweet says images come as close as human beings will get to a universal language:

In the public school system of Fairfax County, Virginia, more than ninety different languages are spoken. But all of those ninety languages, and all the 6,500 languages of the world, share one common language: metaphor. Indeed, it seems clearer than ever that metaphysics is nothing but metaphor. Alter our metaphors, and we transform our being in the world. Alter our metaphors, and we are transformed into the image of Christ. (86)

Since the arrival of the printing press our world has moved from an oral, primarily

narrative communication style, to a textual, primarily linear style. Interestingly with the changes happening in society, the linear style is slowly taking second stage to a more holistic approach. Michael Quicke explains that in this most recent shift the spoken word has been eclipsed by the visual. He says Western society is in the “age of the image” (3). Both the right brain and the left brain are stimulated simultaneously. It involves the heart and feelings as well as the intellect and reason.

To understand this shift further Peter Roche de Coppens points out that “symbols are the ‘language’ and the vehicles ... of the supernatural. They deal with the intuition, with imagination, and with emotion rather than with thinking, sensations, or the will” (137). Symbols, or images, function like a seed in the thoughts of the hearer; almost unknowingly they take root and begin to fill the mind. Roche de Coppens goes on to note that communication happens in three ways. First, the language of everyday speech uses words to communicate; second, the language of science uses concepts to communicate ideas; and, third, the language of religion uses symbols to communicate (137). Webber agrees and suggests language in the worship needs to move more toward images (107).

To underscore this need for image-based language note the work of Pierre Babin. Babin suggests that the form of communication that dominated the Enlightenment was that of conceptual language, language that was logical, linear, full of precision and abstraction, and that placed a significant weight on the relationship of words. The new form of communication in what he calls the post-Enlightenment world is that of symbolic language. This symbolic, or image-based language, recognizes wholes and is intuitive, experiential, and global (150-51).

Contemporary preaching needs to move away from the linear, prepositional truth

and turn to metaphors and images. Images lodge the truth in the imagination. Sweet suggests three reasons why the preacher needs to move their communication through the medium of image:

1. Humans think in images, not words;
2. Postmodern spirituality is image based; and,
3. Worship is not about style; it is about spirit (92-92).

Miller agrees:

More and more preachers who want to capture an audience and hold them are going to have to use images.... Sermons will become more and more powerful as preaching is born in pictures. Image communication may very well be the key to great preaching in the future. (87-88)

Quality 10: purposeful preaching. All preaching needs to be purposeful in what it says and what it seeks to target. The genius of Haddon Robinson's book Biblical Preaching brings to the fore the need for a clear purpose. This purpose does not just start in the delivery; it begins in the text.

Preachers begin by discerning the message given to the original audience. Robinson calls this the "exegetical big idea" (66). They move on and think through that idea so that it has specific application to the contemporary scene. It must be stated so that it relates to both the Bible and the audience. This clearly articulated sentence is called the "homiletical big idea" (97). When a message has the "big idea," it is ready to hit its target. Effective preaching communicates this big idea with relevancy and clarity.

Conclusion

Together these eight principles can build the bridge between the contemporary listener and the ancient text. The first three root the message in the divine revelation, and the next seven attempt to cross over to contemporary culture. Effective preaching is

biblical preaching, and biblical preaching is rooted in the authority of the Word, the redemptive message of Jesus Christ, and the empowering of the Holy Spirit.

Effective preaching has to connect with culture. In order for that to happen, it has to be authentic, relevant, relationally based, solution oriented, multisensory, purposeful, and image based.

Understanding the Role of the Mentor

One final area that is important to this research project is coming to a clear understanding of the role of a mentor. Clara Young suggests that mentoring is a relational experience that involves a personal connection with someone for the purpose of moving them further in growth and development. In her article on the components of successful mentoring, Young highlights several elements that she has gleaned from a variety of different definitions: a nurturing relationship, an integrated approach, the passing on of skills and/or wisdom, and a move towards a dynamic future. She notes several common words in various definitions she has studied: guiding, nurturing, caring, and experience (21-22).

In another article, Ted Mitchell points to four essential components that outline the task of mentoring: teaching, sustaining a common vision, seasoning (meaning practical experience), and growth. Mitchell says teaching is that ability to transfer skill and knowledge to others so that they can reach beyond what they previously assumed were their limits. The second component, the sustaining of a common vision, is the agreed-upon purpose and the values that guide that purpose. The third component provides the mentoree with a place for application of his or her new knowledge or skill. The final component, says Mitchell, is growth. When growth is lacking in the mentoree,

then the relationship and process has failed (41-42).

J. Robert Clinton and Paul D. Stanley capture a strong definition of mentoring in their work. They describe mentoring as “a relational process through which a mentor, who knows or has experienced something, transfers that something (resources of wisdom, information, experience, confidence, insight, etc.) to a mentoree, in an appropriate time and manner, so that it facilitates development or empowerment” (40). They explain “empowerment” as the ability to help someone through a need. It is the transfer of resources between the mentor and mentoree. The resources, as noted, could include a variety of things, and the transfer of knowledge or skill might be done in a variety of ways (32-33).

In their description of mentoring, Clinton and Stanley suggest that a spectrum of relationships have the potential for empowering someone who desires to learn and grow. They group these relationships into three categories, ranging from those that are more deliberate (with more depth and awareness of effort) to those that are less involved. In total Clinton and Stanley identify nine types of relationships.

The first three relationships are intensive:

1. A *discipling mentor* teaches and enables a mentoree in the basics of knowing and following Jesus Christ;

2. A *spiritual guide* serves the relationship by giving accountability, direction, response to questions, commitment, and decisions affecting spiritual decisions and maturity. The spiritual guide is a godly person who has a clear understanding of following Jesus Christ and has the ability to assess spirituality in the mentoree; and,

3. The *coach* is one who provides motivation, application of a needed skill, and

challenge. The coach's "central thrust is to provide motivation and impart skills and application to meet a task or challenge" (Clinton and Stanley 73).

The next three types of relationships are more occasional in nature:

4. The *counselor* gives timely advice and corrective perspective in viewing self, others, circumstances, and ministry (Clinton and Stanley 89);

5. A *teaching mentor* transfers knowledge and understanding on a particular concept or skill (Clinton and Stanley 101); and,

6. A *sponsor* gives career guidance and understanding on a particular subject (Clinton and Stanley 124).

The final types of relationship are the passive models:

7. A model from the *present* or the *past* can serve as a mentor;

8. A *contemporary* model acts as a living, personal model for life or vocation; and,

9. A *historical* model identifies a past life that brings with it dynamic principles and values for living (Clinton and Stanley 41-42).

Having reviewed the potential of the mentoring relationship according to Clinton and Stanley two of those nine relationships that correlate with the PMPP. Given the nature of the field and the intent of the program, my role is likely best seen as a coach and a teacher.

As a teacher-mentor, my task involves giving clarity, understanding, and focus in the subject of effective biblical preaching within the postmodern context. While each of the participants will have a working knowledge of the task of preaching and varying degrees of understanding on what is, or is not, postmodernism, my responsibility will be

to shed light on both those subjects over the course of the ten months. Some of my responsibility will be review; other parts of it will be highlighting key elements in relation to the audiences we communicate and our responsibility as biblical communicators who believe in the inspired authority of the Word. Some of what is taught will guide the participants with an intended purpose (or focus) towards practical application.

Clinton and Stanley outline several functions of the teacher-mentor. The teacher-mentor empowers the mentorees by knowing what resources are available and helpful and drawing on key insights and principles that are particularly beneficial. Part of that is also linking mentorees to those resources for further exploration if needed. According to Clinton and Stanley, the teacher-mentor also organizes and passes on knowledge in a way that is germane to the subject and mentoree. Without the right knowledge and understanding of the relevance of the knowledge to the mentoree's situation, the mentoring relationship is failed. The final function of the teacher-mentor is motivation towards continued learning (112). Adult learning needs an element of self-direction and personal benefit. Adults want to apply tomorrow what they learn today, meaning they will be more willing to learn something that they can perceive it as personally beneficial (Knowles 43-44).

While I will serve as a teacher to those in the PMPP, a greater role will be my relationship as a coach-mentor. The coach-mentor gives motivation for skill, direction in application and challenge (Clinton and Stanley 73). This task is more than a one-time communication of knowledge and skill. It is an ongoing process that happens throughout the mentor-mentoree relationship.

Again, Clinton and Stanley are helpful in defining several basic functions of a coach-mentor: (1) impart skills, (2) impart confidence and understanding in using those skills, (3) motivate people towards a preferred future, (4) model importance of learning the basics skills, (5) direct and point the mentorees to appropriate resources, (6) observe the mentorees in action, and (7) evaluate the mentorees and give beneficial feedback so there is self-learning (82). To do that process well the coach-mentor has to be able to identify key elements in a body of knowledge, understanding both basic knowledge and skill. Along with that comes the ability to bring those key elements to bear on the mentorees lives or work situations. That will come, in part, through a growing relationship and good modeling on the mentor's part (82-83).

Therefore, if the PMPP is going to be a success the mentor-mentoree relationship has to have a well-identified body of knowledge and clear understanding of the practical application of the skills involved. Those two elements will have to be purposefully processed.

Specific to a peer-mentoring relationship are a couple of advantages. A peer-to-peer relationship increases the commonality factor, which in turn gives a greater possibility for authenticity, understanding, and life application. Clinton and Stanley note that the closer the relationship the greater the degree of openness, trust, commitment, accountability, and empowerment (173).

Summary

In view of this review, these factors were addressed as essential to effective preaching in this emerging postmodern context: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit empowered, authentic, relevant, relationally based, solution oriented, multisensory, image

based, purposeful. The use of these ten qualities has the potential to pierce through the cultural malaise and bring the timeless truth to bear on a contemporary audience.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Within the present cultural milieu, a shift has taken place from what has been a long-established worldview referred to as modernism to a new emerging worldview described by many as postmodernism. As has already been stated, this shift is most challenging for the biblical preacher who is called to declare the authority of God's Word with clarity and relevancy. The goal of this preaching is not just declaration but also the preaching of good news that brings redemptive transformation to the mind, heart, and will of the listener.

With this goal in mind, this study seeks to build better preachers—biblical communicators who desire to grow in their craft, developing new knowledge and skill towards effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns, a task that crosses that gap between the ancient biblical texts and the present contemporary context.

Restating the Purpose

The purpose of this research project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a peer mentoring preaching program (PMPP) that enables other preachers to communicate effectively to an emerging postmodern culture. It has taken like-minded participants through a ten-month program that introduced them to key qualities of biblical preaching as they relate to communication within this shifting cultural milieu.

The study naturally breaks into two components: the development of other preachers through the ten-month long PMPP, and the evaluation of my own growth and development in preaching.

The project was guided by three research questions.

Research Question #1

What evidences can be observed in the PMPP participants that indicate they have learned over the duration of the program the effective qualities of preaching to postmoderns?

The answer to this question tests the effectiveness of the program. With the use of the Preaching Observation Guide (POG) the sermons of the participants were evaluated against the ten key qualities that provide for effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns. The pretest served as a baseline to measure where they were in relation to the profile detailed in the POG. After the pretest, the participants were encouraged to preach a sermon every second month (five in total) to be evaluated. These sermons provided a basis of observation for improved ability in preaching.

Research Question #2

What aspect of the PMPP contributed the most to the changes observed in the participants?

Throughout the course of the PMPP, I evaluated the key factors that were most useful in building preachers who are effective in preaching to postmoderns. With the use of a journal, I recorded several observations throughout the project, seeking both the strengths and weaknesses of the program.

Research Question #3

How have people responded in my congregation as I have applied the effective points of preaching to postmoderns?

The third component of this study was the development of my own effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns. The answer to this question was found through the

observations that were made with the focus group in my church. This focus group met at two different times. Through a series of questions, I asked how my sermons had been effective in connecting with their lives. They were informed that the purpose of their feedback was the evaluation of the effectiveness of my preaching in relation to the impact that it has on their lives.

The participants in this focus group were hand picked and personally invited to be involved. They were representative of gender, age, and spiritual maturity within my church, with seeker, new believer, homemaker, professional, church leader, college student, and several who were 55+ years.

Subjects

The subjects of this study were volunteer participants who met the following criteria. Given the context of this study, the participants were expected to have some kind of formal biblical or theological training. They were required to have a minimum of three years experience in the pastorate, a clearly articulated call to preach, and a context where they could apply their new knowledge and skills. The study was open to evangelical pastors. The group was made up of four participants plus myself.

The selection of the subjects involved two steps. The first step included a personal phone call and invitation to participate in the PMPP. It was followed up with a letter outlining the purpose and details of the program. The list of potential participants came from contacts made through personal relationships with ministry colleagues, which included contact with my denominational leaders.

Instrumentation

This study involved criterion-based evaluation using descriptive and evaluative

techniques to identify specific preaching qualities and methods that effectively communicate to postmoderns. In addition, I employed a journal that recorded my observations and interaction with the participants in the PMPP and those who were selected for my focus group. The first goal in providing instrumentation for this study was the development of a structured observation tool to use in my analysis. Toward that end one primary tool was developed, the Preaching Observation Guide (POG). It was shaped through the understanding gleaned from the literature.

The Preaching Observation Guide related to Research Question #1 and focused on the specific qualities evident in effective preaching to postmoderns. This tool employed two methods of evaluation: a Likert scale for an overall evaluation of the sermons' qualities and space dedicated to confirming this evaluation through the demonstration of positive and negative evidence. The qualities against which each sermon was measured were taken from my reading of the literature and the conclusions I made in regards to effective preaching to postmoderns (see Appendix B).

Table 3.1. Sample of Preaching Observation Guide

| The evaluation of the ten qualities is based on the following 5-point scale: | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|--|--------------------|---|----------------|---|------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--|-------------------|--|
| | | 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | |
| | | <i>Not evident</i> | | <i>Unclear</i> | | <i>Undecided</i> | | <i>Clear</i> | | <i>Very Clear</i> | |
| Ten Qualities | | Evaluation | | | | | Examples of Content Observed | | | | |
| 1. Biblically based | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | |
| 2. Christ centered | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | | | | | |

In addition to the POG, this study used a journal to record my observations of the future developments of the participants, the methods used, and the overall success of the

program. A second purpose of the journal was the observation of my own development in preaching.

The final tool used for collecting data was an exit interview with each of the participants. This interview sought to find out what elements of the PMPP were most helpful in developing their preaching, and what could be changed to make it a more effective program in the future.

Data Analysis

Four separate methods of data collection were employed in this study: a pretest, a series of five sermon evaluations, an exit interview, and a journal of my observations throughout the PMPP.

First, each of the participants were asked to submit a representative sermon for a pretest, which was then evaluated by the researcher using the POG. Observations from this evaluation acted as a baseline for growth, and the future development of the participants was measured with the pretest results serving as the starting point.

Second, once the participants started the PMPP, they were asked to submit one sermon every two months. The sermons turned in were asked to be preached within two weeks of the submission date—two weeks from the end of months two, four, six, eight, and ten. Each of these sermons were then evaluated using the POG with the assumption being that the key principles of effective biblical preaching to postmoderns would be adapted cumulatively in their preaching. This series of five evaluations served to measure the development and growth of each of the participants.

Third, upon completion of the program the participants went through exit interviews. The interviews involved a series of questions that sought their input on the

strengths and weaknesses of the program. The data collected from these interviews helped me in my final conclusions determining the effectiveness of the program.

Fourth, throughout the PMPP, I journaled my observations on the program and its effectiveness in regard to the preaching of the participants. The data collected from these observations provided helpful insights, examples, and anecdotal information. The journal recorded not only my observations of the program and participants, but it gave me a place to record the elements of growth in my own preaching. I was looking for areas of improvement, effectiveness, weaknesses, and, in the end, those key ideas that were shaping my thought in relation to effective preaching. The data gleaned from these observations helped me answer Research Question #3.

Once the data were collected, it was analyzed in three stages. Stage one analysis involved listening to and assessing the audio or video sermons, the one representative sermon that was submitted for the pretest and the series of five sermons that submitted during the PMPP. The assessment evaluated the sermon by looking for qualitative and quantitative indicators using the POG. Stage two analyses involved the assessment of the overall PMPP. It particularly looked at the effectiveness of the program in its development of each of the participant's ability to preach to postmoderns. This happened following the analysis of the sermons and the completion of the ten-month PMPP. The final analysis, stage three, assessed my own development and ability to preach to postmoderns. This analysis involved a representative focus group from my congregation and my own journaled observations of my preaching.

Variables

The independent variable in this study was the ten-month PMPP. It consisted of

ten qualities of biblical preaching: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit empowered, authentic, relevant, relational, solution oriented, multisensory, image based, and purposeful. The program sought to affect the ability of the participants and measure their effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns. The dependent variable was the ability of the participants' preaching. This study also observed a number of intervening variables. These included the age, background, education, experience, and the ministry contexts in which they preached.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This project was essentially a case study that examined the ability of a select group of participants to improve their effectiveness in preaching to postmoderns. The results of this research are generalized only to those who participated. This study sought to indicate how people can be better equipped in their ongoing desire to preach effectively to postmoderns, but it was limited to those who participated. No claims are made about a wider population of preachers and their effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

A readily accessible and tangible measure of the qualities of effective biblical preaching is in the outward observation of one's preaching. From the beginning, the PMPP was set up so that ten qualities of effective biblical preaching were understood, applied, and then observed in each of the individual participants. The presumed effect of the program was that the participants would increase in their ability to communicate in a postmodern context. Therefore, the goal of this research project is the evaluation of the observed change in the participants' preaching and the resultant parts of the program that contributed the most to this change.

Three research questions guided this study: What evidence can be observed in the PMPP participants that indicates they have learned over the duration of the program the effective qualities of preaching to postmoderns? What aspect of the PMPP contributed the most to the changes observed in the participants? How have people responded in my congregation as I have applied the effective principles of preaching to postmoderns?

Profile of Participants

The process of inviting individuals to participate in the PMPP began six months before the first session. Various individuals were approached, and by the beginning of the program seven were committed to participate in the ten-month program. Over the course of the first six months of the program, three participants dropped out due to changes in health and ministry circumstances; therefore, the following data are limited to the four who participated in the full length of the program. The four participants all had a minimum of five years pastoral ministry experience. Two had under graduate degrees in

biblical studies, and two had Master of Divinity degrees. All were serving with the Christian and Missionary Alliance in the greater Vancouver area and all were male. Two of the participants were senior pastors who preached weekly, and two were associate pastors who had a weekly midweek teaching ministry with over a hundred people in attendance, as well as regular opportunities to preach in the weekend services of their churches. Of the four, two served primarily Caucasian congregations; one served an English-speaking Asian congregation; and, the last one served an English-speaking Filipino congregation. The participants ranged in age between 27 and 50; 40 was the mean age.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data sources for this research project were the audio and video-taped sermons of each of the participants involved in the ten-month PMPP, the exit interviews done at the conclusion of the program, as well as the observations and anecdotal comments taken from the focus groups, the ten sessions, and my own journaling.

The data were collected in three stages over the course of eleven months. The first stage was the pretest. Each participant submitted an audio or video sermon that had been preached before the beginning of the first session. This sermon was then evaluated against the standard that was established prior to the program, the Preaching Observation Guide. The second stage was the evaluation of successive sermons through the ten-month program and the insights and observations that were noted in my own journaling. The third and final stage was the exit interview, which specifically focused on garnering feedback on the effectiveness of the whole PMPP and the key learning points of each of the participants. Once all the data were collected a period of organizing and analysis

followed. The findings were examined to determine if the intervening variables of education, ministry role, and length of time in ministry had any impact on the outcomes. No discernable effects were observed based upon these intervening variables. The following information is the product of that analysis.

Baseline Abilities

Each of the pretest sermons measured the ten qualities of effective biblical preaching, using a five-point Likert scale that ranged from 1.0 to 5.0, and identified baseline evidence of ability to preach biblically and effectively. Later observed changes in the PMPP participants' preaching would indicate that they learned over the duration of the program the effective qualities of preaching to postmoderns.

Participants scored a mean of 34.5 out of a possible total score of 50 in their pretests (see Table 4.1). A comparison of those qualities that were positive (a score of 23 representing clear or very clear on the Preaching Observation Guide) with those qualities that were uncertain or negative (a score of 17 representing an undecided, not evident, or unclear) indicates the subjects' scoring in the program generally had significant room for improvement in appropriating the ten qualities in their preaching (see Table 4.2). On average the participants showed a positive score in a little less than six out of ten qualities (57.5 percent average). The pretest comparison also showed the participants scoring 15 percent more positive qualities than those that were uncertain or negative.

Table 4.1. Comparison of Participants' Pretests

| Participant | A | B | C | D | Mean |
|-------------|----|----|----|----|------|
| Pretest | 33 | 34 | 35 | 36 | 34.5 |

Table 4.2. Comparison of Qualities in Pretest

| Participant | A | B | C | D | Total |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------|
| Qualities Receiving a Positive Score* | 6 | 5 | 6 | 6 | 23 |
| Qualities Receiving a Negative Score+ | 4 | 5 | 4 | 4 | 17 |

* Those qualities receiving either a 4 "clear" or 5 "very clear."

+ Those qualities receiving either a 3 "undecided," 2 "unclear" or 1 "not evident."

A further analysis of the positive and negative scores and their relationship to each of the ten qualities indicates that there were several strengths that the group had coming into the program and several observed weaknesses that were consistent with each of them (see Table 4.3). Collectively, the participants were strong in the following qualities with at least three of the four registering a positive score: biblically based, relevant, solution oriented, and purposeful. On the other side of the scale, three qualities were weak in at least three of the four scores: Spirit empowered, multisensory, and image based. In addition the pretest revealed three qualities that scored equally in a strength-weakness comparison: Christ centered, authentic, and relational.

Table 4.3. Comparison of Strengths and Weaknesses in Pretest

| Quality* | Participant | | | | Total Pos. | Total Neg. |
|----------------------|-------------|---|---|---|---------------|---------------|
| | A | B | C | D | | |
| 1. Biblically based | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 4 | 0 |
| 2. Christ centered | x | ✓ | x | ✓ | 2 | 2 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | ✓ | x | x | x | 1 | 3 |
| 4. Authentic | ✓ | ✓ | x | x | 2 | 2 |
| 5. Relevant | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 4 | 0 |
| 6. Relational | x | x | ✓ | ✓ | 2 | 2 |
| 7. Solution oriented | ✓ | x | ✓ | ✓ | 3 | 1 |
| 8. Multisensory | x | x | x | x | 0 | 4 |
| 9. Image based | x | x | ✓ | x | 1 | 3 |
| 10. Purposeful | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | 4 | 0 |

✓ Indicates a positive score (scoring a 4 or 5 on the Preaching Observation Guide).

x Indicates a negative score (scoring a 3,2 or 1 on the Preaching Observation Guide).

* For definitions of qualities see Appendix B.

The pretest evaluations revealed a general strength in the participants' ability to communicate biblical truth with clarity and purpose, thus the high scores in the biblically based and purposeful qualities. Data further indicated a general strength in their ability to connect with their audiences in relevant themes and applications as seen in high scores in relevancy and solution oriented. The observed weaknesses lay more in the process of communication (multisensory and image based) and in the sense of empowering by the Spirit. Apparently, the real challenge of communicating within the postmodern context for these participants was in their ability to understand how people receive and process information.

Observed Changes

A variety of data produced helped identify changes in the participants' preaching and their ability to appropriate the ten qualities. The modified time series design allowed the ensuing sermons to be measured against the initial baseline data gathered through the pretest. Not all participants handed in the expected six sermons, but sufficient evidence of

change was indicated nonetheless. One participant handed in six sermons, two handed in five, and one handed in four.

Participants exhibited an overall positive change in their first sermon preached after the pretest (see Tables 4.4-4.7). In the ten qualities that were evaluated there was either maintenance of the previous score or an improvement in thirty-two out of a possible thirty-eight categories (half of those showed an improvement). A comparison of the final sermon with the pretest shows a positive change of 12, 10, 9, and 11 in each of the participants, A through D respectively. In all but two cases, scores improved over the preceding sermon (a total of sixteen sermons were preached following the pretest).

Table 4.4. Comparison of Sermons: Participant A

| Sermon | Pretest/1 | 2 | 3* | 4 | 5 | 6 | Change+/- |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|----|------------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Biblically based | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| 2. Christ centered | 1 | 5 | -- | 5 | 2 | 5 | +4 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 4 | 4 | -- | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| 4. Authentic | 4 | 4 | -- | 5 | 5 | 4 | 0 |
| 5. Relevant | 5 | 4 | -- | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 6. Relational | 2 | 3 | -- | 2 | 5 | 4 | +2 |
| 7. Solution oriented | 4 | 4 | -- | 5 | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| 8. Multisensory | 1 | 1 | -- | 1 | 3 | 4 | +3 |
| 9. Image based | 3 | 4 | -- | 4 | 4 | 4 | +1 |
| 10. Purposeful | 5 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Total Score | 33 | 39 (+6) | -- | 41 (+8) | 43 (+10) | 45 (+12) | +12 |

* Indicates participant did not submit a sermon for this requested period.

+ Indicates a positive (+) or negative (-) change from sermon 1 to sermon 6.

() Number in parentheses indicates positive (+) or negative (-) change from pretest.

Table 4.5. Comparison of Sermons: Participant B

| Sermon | Pretest/1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | Change+/- |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Biblically based | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| 2. Christ centered | 5 | 3 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 2 | -3 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 3 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | +2 |
| 4. Authentic | 4 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| 5. Relevant | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | 0 |
| 6. Relational | 3 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 5 | +2 |
| 7. Solution oriented | 2 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | +3 |
| 8. Multisensory | 1 | 1 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 4 | +3 |
| 9. Image based | 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 3 | +1 |
| 10. Purposeful | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | 4 | 5 | +1 |
| Total Score | 34 | 35 (+1) | 46 (+12) | 48 (+14) | 39 (+5) | 44 (+10) | +10 |

+ Indicates a positive (+) or negative (-) change from sermon 1 to sermon 6.

() Number in parentheses indicates positive (+) or negative (-) change from pretest.

Table 4.6. Comparison of Sermons: Participant C

| Sermon | Pretest/1 | 2 | 3 | 4* | 5 | 6 | Change+/- |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|-------------|----|------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. Biblically based | 5 | 5 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 2. Christ centered | 3 | 3 | 3 | -- | 2 | 5 | +2 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 3 | 4 | 4 | -- | 4 | 5 | +2 |
| 4. Authentic | 2 | 3 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | +3 |
| 5. Relevant | 5 | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| 6. Relational | 4 | 3 | 5 | -- | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| 7. Solution oriented | 4 | 4 | 4 | -- | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| 8. Multisensory | 1 | 4 | 4 | -- | 2 | 3 | +2 |
| 9. Image based | 4 | 5 | 5 | -- | 3 | 4 | 0 |
| 10. Purposeful | 4 | 5 | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | +1 |
| Total Score | 35 | 40 (+5) | 45 (+10) | -- | 40 (+5) | 44 (+9) | +9 |

* Indicates participant did not submit a sermon for this requested period.

+ Indicates a positive (+) or negative (-) change from sermon 1 to sermon 6.

() Number in parentheses indicates positive (+) or negative (-) change from pretest.

Table 4.7. Comparison of Sermons: Participant D

| Sermon | Pretest/1 | 2* | 3 | 4 | 5* | 6 | Change+/- |
|----------------------|-----------|----|------------|------------|----|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Biblically based | 5 | -- | 5 | 5 | -- | 5 | 0 |
| 2. Christ centered | 5 | -- | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | 0 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 3 | -- | 4 | 4 | -- | 4 | +1 |
| 4. Authentic | 2 | -- | 4 | 4 | -- | 4 | +2 |
| 5. Relevant | 4 | -- | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | +1 |
| 6. Relational | 4 | -- | 3 | 3 | -- | 4 | 0 |
| 7. Solution oriented | 4 | -- | 4 | 4 | -- | 5 | +1 |
| 8. Multisensory | 1 | -- | 5 | 4 | -- | 5 | +4 |
| 9. Image based | 3 | -- | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | +2 |
| 10. Purposeful | 5 | -- | 4 | 5 | -- | 5 | 0 |
| Total Score | 36 | -- | 41 (+5) | 44 (+8) | -- | 47 (+11) | +11 |

* Indicates participant did not submit a sermon for this requested period.

+ Indicates a positive (+) or negative (-) change from sermon 1 to sermon 6.

() Number in parentheses indicates positive (+) or negative (-) change from pretest.

The improvement in the subjects' preaching is also observed by comparing a list of the qualities that measured either a negative or uncertain score in the pretest with those qualities that measured negative or uncertain in the final sermon (see Table 4.8). In those scores, only four measured negative or uncertain in the final series of messages in comparison to a score seventeen in the pretest. While some similarity was found between the final sermon and the pretest, it was a surprise to see two of the participants indicate a weakness with the Christ-centered quality in their final sermon.

Table 4.8. Comparison of Negative and Uncertain Qualities between the Pretest and

| Final Sermon | | | |
|----------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|
| Quality | Neg. / Uncertain Qualities in the Pretest | Neg. / Uncertain Qualities in the Final Sermon | Difference + / - |
| 1. Biblically based | -- | -- | -- |
| 2. Christ centered | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 3 | -- | +3 |
| 4. Authentic | 2 | -- | +2 |
| 5. Relevant | -- | -- | -- |
| 6. Relational | 2 | -- | +2 |
| 7. Solution oriented | 1 | -- | +1 |
| 8. Multisensory | 4 | 1 | +3 |
| 9. Image based | 3 | 1 | +1 |
| 10. Purposeful | -- | -- | -- |
| Total | 17 | 4 | |

Comparison is the cumulative measure of all four pretests against the cumulative measure of all four of the final sermons.

At the conclusion of the PMPP, each of the participants gave feedback in the exit interview on their personal growth and learning (see Appendix D for exit interview questions). Two specific questions were asked to evaluate the changes they saw in themselves: question 1, “As you look back over the ten months, what have been the two or three greatest learning points for you?” and question 13, “Do you feel that your own preaching has been affected by the program? (Yes/No). In what ways?” While the answers varied from person to person, two consistent comments stood out: First, the participants agreed that they had grown in both their understanding and ability in creating word images, and two, they had begun to explore various multisensory points of communication. Table 4.9 summarizes the anecdotal evidence noted from the participants’ comments.

Table 4.9. Observations of Personal Change from Exit Interview

| Question | Participants' Observations |
|---------------------------|---|
| Greatest Learning Points* | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ The preaching of the five senses, multisensory preaching ▫ The value of image-based preaching—understanding the power of a picture ▫ Asking myself different questions in preparation ▫ Learning to evaluate the mechanics of my sermon—asking new questions in my preparation ▫ Looking for a possible image in the text that can be used in communication ▫ Developing the skill of narrative preaching—understanding how best to use it ▫ Understanding the effects of postmodernism on an ethnic congregation |
| Change in Own Preaching+ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Much more in tune with postmodernism, image based, multisensory and narrative preaching ▫ Enabled me to use new elements in my communication—narrative style, video illustrations ▫ Brought a deeper appreciation of the preaching task and helped me look at my weaker points ▫ More thoughtful in the crafting of my message ▫ Was pushed out of my comfort zones to consider new ideas—narrative and video |

* Exit Interview Question #1: As you look back over the ten months, what have been the two or three greatest learning points for you?

+ Exit Interview Question #13: Do you feel that your own preaching has been affected by this program? Yes/No In what ways?

The group was also unified in answering question three in the exit interview, “When it comes to postmodernism do you feel like you have an initial understanding of it and how it affects our contemporary audiences? Yes/No. If yes, what is it about postmodernism that stands out in your mind as critical to your communication?” They all affirmed a positive answer and went on to list a variety of key characteristics: helping people understand the truth holistically, the value of truth in community, the use of images in communication, and more experiential as opposed to knowledge-based learning.

Through the ten-month PMPP, I noted several observations and anecdotal comments indicating positive change towards the effective use of the ten qualities. These

observations and comments related to a lot of different aspects of the program, from postmodernism, to specific qualities, to the use of the narrative sermon in preaching (see Table 4.10).

Table 4.10. Observations of Personal Change from Journal

| Area of Growth | Observations from Participants |
|-----------------|---|
| Postmodernism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Gives a framework for thinking and understanding how to bring application |
| Christ centered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Asking, “How does this relate to Christ in my audience’s life?” |
| Authentic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ One participant notes that our preaching needs to communicate our own struggle with the truth |
| Relevant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Recognized that he was only being relevant to people like him, needs to work at considering the wider interests and needs of his whole audience |
| Image based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Asking, “What image is there that I can communicate?” ▫ Preached a message using a defining image (shepherd); the feedback from the focus group was that the image made the difference in their understanding ▫ Significant discussion and new understanding on the value and use of using an image (Session 8) |
| Narrative style | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Used the narrative style—great feedback from his congregation, said he would have never been able to do it without the PMPP |
| Process of PMPP | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Finds the process of the ten-month program good, forces him to look closely at what he is doing |

Assessment of PMPP

The second research question asks, “What aspect of the PMPP contributed the most to the changes observed in the participants?” This question sought to identify the elements of the program that contributed the most to the observed change in the participants. The purpose behind this question was to provide a framework for understanding what part of the program had the most impact and where it could be developed for future potential.

The program was designed to incorporate a number of different elements that would give the subjects the opportunity to learn, interact with, and apply new ideas. Each of the sessions involved a time of teaching, discussion, and interaction with the reading and sample audio or video sermons. Often those elements played off each other. Outside the class the group was encouraged to read assigned books and articles and gather feedback from their focus group. In addition a critical element of the program was the application of what was being learned through the regular evaluation of each of the participants' sermons.

Three questions were developed in the exit interview to observe which elements of the program produced the greatest contribution to participants' growth: (1) "As you look back on the ten monthly sessions, place a value on each of the following elements in terms of their benefit to you (1—least valuable, 5—most valuable): teaching and content, discussion and interaction, audio and video examples, application—six sermons, assigned reading, supplementary reading;" (2) "Of the ten sessions explain what part(s) of the sessions were more beneficial for you?"; and, (3) "What part(s) of the sessions were the least beneficial? Explain."

The responses to those questions revealed that an important value was placed on the group discussion and interaction, along with the examples of sermons listened to and discussed in the class, and the teaching component (see Table 4.11). The elements that received the least value were the readings. One participant commented, "I found the assigned readings and the focus groups hard to find time for, so that's why they were the least beneficial (probably my fault)." In discussing this with the group it was agreed that the issue of time was a challenge, particularly as it related to the out-of-class reading and

focus groups. The elements that received the highest value were clearly the in-class elements. At several different times through the program comments were received that indicated a high value on the group discussion and interaction. After the third session one participant felt the group interaction had been good, but wished there had been more. Later in the program it was noted that those interaction times were critical in each of the sessions. The interaction made the difference in whether the group engaged the ideas or just referenced them in their notes. One participant commented in their exit interview, “I especially enjoyed our group discussion and interaction as we learned from each other.”

Out of a possible twenty-four scores for question seven in the exit interview, seventeen of them were given a value of four or five, indicating a high degree of value for 71 percent of the elements in the PMPP (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. The Value Attributed to the Elements of the PMPP

| Elements of PMPP | Values Given by Each Participant | Cumulative Value of All Participants |
|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Teaching/content | 5, 3, 4, 4 | 16 |
| Discussion/interaction | 4, 5, 5, 4 | 18 |
| Audio/video sermon examples | 3, 4, 5, 5 | 17 |
| Application—6 sermons | 4, 3, 4, 3 | 14 |
| Assigned reading—books | 4, 1, 4, 4 | 13 |
| Supplementary reading—articles | 4, 2, 4, 2 | 12 |
| The values were based on a five-point Likert scale with 1 as “least valuable” and 5 as “most valuable.” | | |

When the group was asked what elements of the program were the most beneficial, the comments again were weighted towards the in-class elements of the program (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. The Most and Least Beneficial Elements of the Sessions

| Most Beneficial | | Least Beneficial | |
|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| ▫ | Group discussion and interaction | ▫ | Assigned readings and focus groups (due to personal schedule) |
| ▫ | Discussions and video examples | ▫ | Andy Stanley video example |
| ▫ | Session 8, The Power of Picture | ▫ | None |
| ▫ | Teaching | | |
| ▫ | Discussion | | |

Overall then, the elements of the PMPP program that contributed the most to the changes in the participants were the teaching, discussion and interaction, and the use of the audio and video examples. Of those three in-class elements, the learning that was derived from the sharing and interaction received the most positive feedback.

Impact on Congregation

The third research question asks, “How have people responded in my congregation as I have applied the effective principles of preaching to postmoderns?” This question sought to understand my own ability to appropriate the research content and the effect of that knowledge on my own congregation as I applied the ten qualities. Initially I assumed that I would set up a focus group early in the PMPP, but like the participants in the program I found this hard to set up.

After the sixth session a focus group was established in my congregation. The group included individuals from various backgrounds, spiritual experiences, and age groups. The following defining characteristics were evident in the focus group: a high school student, a young couple in their twenties, a couple in their thirties, a senior, a church elder and his wife, a professional, and a professing agnostic.

The group was initially briefed on the ten qualities of effective preaching and the purpose of the PMPP. They were given an outline of the ten qualities and their definitions

and then asked to review randomly six sermons over the next three months, noting their observations as a whole in relation to the ten qualities. During that three-month period, many of their comments were noted and passed on to me, giving me immediate feedback. At the end of the three months, the group was invited to my house for an informal evaluation of my preaching. The evaluation was led with a series of probing questions that sought to discern which of the ten qualities were observed, effective, and strongest in my preaching (see Appendix E).

The responses ranged from the indifferent to the profoundly moved (see Tables 4.13 and 4.14). One of the strongest responses came from a series of messages on the “wounded spirit.” The focus of one of the sermons dealt with past pain and wounds that affect us. Due to the sensitivity of many of those issues I made an effort to move the lecture stand to the right and speak conversationally from a stool. I began my message by sharing from my own experience and then moved towards Jesus Christ’s humanity and redemptive provision. One person came up to me after the message and said, “That was the most amazing service ever. The best service I have been to since I have been coming to Surrey Alliance. Just the way you did your sermon, it felt so warm, so intimate—just like you were in our living room having a conversation.” Another positive comment came from the focus group: “You have a way of making [the truth] apply to our daily life. You always bring in your personal experiences and show yourself as a real person. That helps me identify with what you are saying.”

Table 4.13. Journal Observations on the Effect of My Preaching

| Area of Observation | Summary of Comments from Journal |
|--|--|
| January series on the "Wounded Spirit" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ The human need—pain and woundedness—was a strong connection with people ▫ Built two of the three sermons around an image: brokenness and the Wounded Healer ▫ Gave a great opportunity to focus on the provision of healing, strength, and hope in Christ the Wounded Healer ▫ I took a huge risk in revealing my own ability to wound those I love, talked about anger and impatience in my life ▫ Received many positive comments on my self-revelation ▫ The most positive feedback on any sermon series |
| Authentic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ I am constantly aware of how my material is being presented, constantly asking myself if I am genuinely grappling with the truth in the text ▫ Find people connect well when I am genuine and self-revealing about the application of the truth in my own life |
| Image based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Good feedback on my use of images ▫ Not as good at developing an overall image in the sermon, but I am working at using the images that are there in text |
| Ten qualities of effective preaching | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Have become more aware of the ten qualities in my preparation; they have provided a filter for my thoughts in bringing the truth to bear on my congregation |

Table 4.14. Focus Group Observations on the Effect of My Preaching

| Areas | Summary of Observations |
|------------------|---|
| Biblically based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ The practical elements of bringing the Scriptures to people's attention are helpful—from reading the text, to putting it on PowerPoint ▫ Comments were generally positive, but this was not the strongest quality |
| Christ centered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ The observations on this quality were neither overly positive nor weak—a couple commented that they saw this quality there all the time, but not everyone commented ▫ Not a lot of feedback |
| Spirit empowered | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Generally the focus group commented that they were not sure if they could recognize the evidence of this quality ▫ Yet many positive observations regarding the relevance and challenge of the messages and, at times, feeling like I was speaking just to them |
| Authentic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Clearly this was observed as the strongest quality in my preaching—felt like I was conversing with them as opposed to preaching at them ▫ Honest, genuine, and gentle in my preaching ▫ Practical physical change—built a smaller and lower platform to preach from—people felt like I was no longer preaching down at them |

Table 4.14. Focus Group Observations on the Effect of My Preaching, continued

| Areas | Summary of Observations |
|-------------------|--|
| Relevant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Topics of the sermons are relevant to where people are; some of the more notable were sex, wounded spirit, servanthood, the hands of Christ, relationship conflict ▫ Indicated that my preaching seems to come to life, connecting with their life ▫ Most commented that they are walking away with something every week, while one or two are finding that at times nothing hits them |
| Relational | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Not a lot of feedback either positive or negative on this quality |
| Solution oriented | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Many comments about taking something away from the sermon, but again, not a lot of feedback on this quality |
| Multisensory | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ High value on the use of video clips as introductions to messages—used four times ▫ One individual was moved by the physical lighting of a candle at the altar (sermon on holiness) ▫ Some struggled to see how the touching of the various senses would be valuable-particularly smell and touch |
| Image based | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ When a larger image was used throughout a message—such as the wounded healer or God as the light of life—there was much more positive feedback ▫ The messages that had the most impact often were the messages that dealt with a large image ▫ Lesser word pictures used as points or sub-points received little comment |
| Purposeful | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▫ Comments were minimal; group observed that the messages were clear but were not sure how to comment on this quality |

At the same time the high school student in my focus group said that sometimes the sermons were not connecting with him. He saw the problem as a lack of empowering by the Spirit when he said, “Sometimes it feels like you are just trying to get your points out and not working with the Spirit.” Other comments suggested some of the qualities were either ineffective or not necessary for their learning experience. Generally though, the comments were positive, acknowledging the impact of the messages on their lives.

Those qualities that have the greatest impact on my congregation are authenticity and image-based communication. When I used a prevailing image through my message I

found that I received the strongest positive response. At times the images carried the weight of emotion or personal appeal and, therefore, carried with them a high degree of relevance for the audience, and at other times when the sermon was more didactic in style it received little to no comment from the congregation. I was consistently perceived as someone who communicated with a sense of genuineness and understanding. One member summarized his perspective with this comment: “Your sermons were not with words from above, but words down where the people are.”

Summary of Major Findings

1. Important, positive change was observed in the participants’ preaching through the course of the PMPP. This change was cumulative from sermon to sermon, rather than between the pretest and the final sermon.

2. The weakness in the participants’ preaching was in the process of communication rather than the ability to understand the truth of the text or the needs of the audience. The participants were weaker in those qualities that related directly to the nature of communication as opposed to those qualities that related to the content.

3. The PMPP was strongest in two areas: first, in the learning that happened through the in-class interactions and, second, in the process that was created for the application of the ten key qualities.

4. The weakness of the PMPP was in the expectations of the participants’ out-of-class time. Outside of the sermons that were submitted for evaluation, each of the participants found the time commitment difficult to commit to.

5. While my own preaching lacked a strong affirmation of the first three foundational qualities, it has been effective in connecting with the hearts of my

congregation-particularly in the qualities of authenticity and relevance.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to develop a peer mentoring preaching program that would enable participants to increase their effectiveness in preaching in the emerging postmodern context. While the previous chapters have laid out the research methodology, the details of the project, and the findings of the study, this chapter discusses four summary observations.

As a whole the PMPP proved to be effective towards enabling the participants in using the ten qualities of effective biblical preaching. The larger purpose was not just to help them get a grasp of the ten qualities but to help them effectively communicate biblical truth in the emerging postmodern milieu. While the data has revealed a positive impact, one cannot assume effectiveness in relation to something that has yet to be fully defined, namely postmodernism.

Given the above challenge, four summary observations are outlined in this chapter: (1) the importance of process in acquiring new skills, (2) the challenge of “in fleshing” the Word, (3) the value of considering a new preaching model, and (4) the lessons that will last a lifetime.

Learning to Preach Effectively

The first goal of the PMPP was to observe over the ten-month program any noted improvement in the understanding and use of the effective qualities of preaching. The research showed the participants that new understanding of these qualities required a learning environment that would transfer skill and knowledge to someone else so that they were empowered to do what previously they were unable to do (Clinton and Stanley

40). However that environment was established, it needed to create an opportunity for three things: the transfer of relevant knowledge to the mentoree, a learning that had immediate application, and an element of coaching that clarified, encouraged, and motivated along the way.

The PMPP did all three. The overall strength of the program appeared to be the appropriation of relevant knowledge and skill over a prolonged period of time. Each of the participants came into the program with various motivations for learning. For some it was a chance to rethink how they preached, and for others it was the challenge of speaking into the emerging postmodern context (although they all would have acknowledged that they had little to no understanding of what that context was or what the emerging markers were). Thus, the very task of learning new knowledge in regard to preaching and postmodernism was motivation enough. In addition the participants saw that the program was set up so they could “learn as they go.” Along with the readings, classroom discussions, and personal sermon evaluations, both old and new elements needed to be assimilated each month, all of which were adaptable to their ministry context. Finally, they valued the support of a mentor guiding them along as was indicated in the exit interviews.

This appropriation of knowledge and skill agrees with Clinton and Stanley’s description of a mentoring relationship defined as a coach and teacher. New skills and knowledge were transferred to the participants (teacher) and application was encouraged appropriate to the mentorees’ ministry context (coach) (73).

What became critical to the program’s effectiveness was the process involved. It was long in view and short in approach. By that I mean each month new concepts and

new expectations were placed upon the participants. They were expected to learn these and bring them into their preaching context on a monthly, if not weekly, basis. That short monthly approach, with readings, interaction, and evaluations, provided the learners to keep on task with their learning, yet the program was longer than most seminary courses and much longer than adult-learning seminars. The ten-month view kept the new understanding and skills in front of the learners with the critical elements constantly in focus: communication, postmodernism, and the ten qualities of effective biblical preaching.

This process of walking alongside the participants through a flexible environment of learning enabled the participants to change the way they preached. The improvement of their use of the ten qualities, the increasingly higher scores, and the periodic anecdotal evidence all bear witness to the impact of the program. Young describes this as a “relational experience” in the research (21), and Clinton and Stanley refer to it as a “relational process” (40).

Surprisingly, one of the valued aspects of the program that was mentioned by the participants was the chance to reflect on various styles of biblical preaching, such as the traditional expository, narrative, or topical styles. One of the comments that reflected this idea came from the one participant who indicated he was “more thoughtful in crafting his message” and that he was “enabled to use new elements in [his] communication.” The ten-month program not only kept the key elements in view but also allowed for other learning in related areas.

Another example of the learning that was taking place was seen midway through the program. As I reflected on the first half of the program, I realized that the best

learning was happening during spirited conversation and interaction with the session content. Often the material would take a direction of its own. However, learning was always happening, sometimes by battling through an idea and, at other times, by listening to another's experience. New ideas were being formed and old concepts reshaped. The right information was not necessarily always being delivered (although that was a critical part of the learning at other times), but prime learning evolved from the energy that was generated when the group began to engage. The best sessions were the ones that found me blending into the group and becoming just one of several contributors. I was both in the circle and somewhat outside, gently leading, facilitating, asking exploratory questions, and bringing my own spontaneous thoughts to the discussion.

The participants would have been aided if they had made a stronger commitment to meet with their focus groups. With only two establishing a group (and even with that their meetings were minimal), the participants received limited feedback. The one participant found out when meeting with his focus group that he was only partially connecting with his audience. They informed him that often he was only relating to "people like him" and that sometimes he missed those who were younger and came from a different socioeconomic background. At another time that same participant was encouraged with the group's immediate feedback when they noted his ability to develop a metaphor effectively and carry it through the entirety of his message. Doubtless, if the focus groups had been used through the course of the program, the participants would have been further along in their learning and development. The strength of the focus groups was the qualitative feedback that would have encouraged them to know just how effective they really were.

Having said that, the key elements that did keep the participants on track were the monthly gatherings, the bimonthly sermon evaluations and feedback, and the suggested readings and audio sermon examples. The directed learning was outlined before the first meeting with specific objectives and learning goals for each session. It not only outlined the direction of the course but the relevant knowledge and skills that needed to be assimilated by the participants. The program was not rigid, but it allowed for flexibility and interaction from the participants, keeping the various backgrounds, experiences, and ministry contexts in mind.

Thus, the first gleaning that can be observed is the value of creating a flexible learning environment where both knowledge and skill can be processed over an extended period of time. With the demands placed upon ministers and the constant challenge of new information and new understandings in various related fields, the ten-month program enabled each of the participants to have success. The program was only going to succeed if the participants succeeded.

In the future, repeating this study with different subjects from a variety of contexts, both geographically and culturally, would add value. The value of the ten qualities within various contexts would likely shift from situation to situation. Two of the participants in my study ministered primarily in an Asian-Canadian context. They sometimes found themselves struggling to know what was appropriate when it came to the disclosure of personal information (the quality of authenticity) and at other times wondering where best to take their cues for exploring sensory experiences. Would they look to contemporary Canadian culture or the more traditional images and experiences from their native lands?

Further value would also be added to the research if the qualities were studied to see which ones were most effective in various contexts. A variety of results might become apparent due to ethnic, social, or age demographics in a congregation, or even the historical relationship a congregation has with a certain style of biblical preaching.

The Challenge of In-Fleshing the Word

At the outset the research was shaped by the theological question that was drawn out of John 1: How does the preacher “in flesh” the Word? How does the biblical communicator cross the bridge from the world of the sacred text to the world that is dotted with evidences of an emerging postmodernism? How does the preacher connect with our ever-emerging culture in ways that allow the Word of God to bring about genuine life transformation?

At the very least the research suggested that if the Word was going to be “in fleshed,” the crossing of the bridge meant neither to surrender to the culture nor ignore it. Instead the goal was to take the eternal truth of the gospel and bring it to bear on the life, custom and ideology of culture. What became apparent through the research was that in order to bring the gospel to bear on the culture, certain points of connection, touch points of relevancy, needed to appear (Morris 102; Stott 138). These touch points were not so much steps to be followed as they were points of contact that seemed to give way to the human heart. From that discussion, ten qualities of effective biblical communication emerged: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit empowered, authenticity, relevant, relational, solution oriented, multisensory, image based, and purposeful. Together these qualities provided the necessary points of connection.

Two qualities that were particularly challenging for the participants became

apparent early in the program: multisensory and image based. The Preaching Observation Guide defined these two qualities as follows. Multisensory preaching “invites the listener to experience the truth through a variety (more than one) of experiences that involve the senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.” When the image-based quality is in effect, the “communicator makes use of images in his presentation, using either visible and/or mental images.” Now sometimes these two qualities can be applied with one application as was observed in one of the evaluated sermons. The PMPP participant focused on John 1 and unwrapped the theological truth contained in the image of Jesus Christ as the light of the world. At one point in the sermon, he flashed a large beam of light toward the audience highlighting both the intensity and penetrating effect. Not only was he able to tie both the image and the senses together, but the audience was also left with the lasting impression of that light.

The data does not show why these two qualities were weaker than the rest, but one possibility surfaces when the anecdotal evidence is looked at again. One of the major learning points through the whole program was the use of these two qualities (see Table 4.9 p. 78), yet the participants either did not know how to look for these qualities in their exegesis and communication or they thought they never had permission to preach that way. The latter is suggested because through the course of the sessions the participants had an underlying assumption in the discussions that “good biblical preaching” followed a reasoned and deductive approach. They needed to see the extensive biblical examples of creative, multisensory communication before they believed this was true to the clarion call of biblical preaching. This is exactly what the research suggested. The message will speak to the “eyes with healing images” (Miller 39). It will recognize the whole, the

intuitive, the experiential (Babin 150-51).

Beyond that, much of the participants' college and seminary education in biblical preaching and communication may have been so linear and deductive that the participants found it unnatural to think in ways that are right-brain and inductive in approach.

Difficulties often arise in seeing a defining image in the text. It becomes difficult if someone is naturally used to a linear, point-by-point, approach of the text. Along with these issues, the challenge of helping the audience hear the truth is difficult enough, let alone trying to figure out ways that the audience can see, touch, smell, and taste the truth.

Drawing from my own experience, I observe that this issue has been part of the struggle in my own development as a preacher. Many, if not all, of the examples of biblical preaching that I observed up until my early twenties were highly deductive, verse-by-verse, or paragraph-by-paragraph expositions of the text. Even my theological and pastoral training was based upon a linear method of presentation. For a number of years, I assumed that to approach the text with too much creativity and affect was simply inappropriate. If I did, then I was not giving enough care to the text and simply leaning on human elements of persuasion.

While I do not deny a risk is involved in the overuse of the multisensory and image based qualities, effective biblical preaching needs to consider the way the twenty-first century audiences are increasingly seeing, hearing, and experiencing information. If the goal of biblical communication is life transformation then these two qualities are valuable touch points. Again the research agrees. If "[m]ore and more preachers who want to capture an audience and hold them they are going to have to use images" (Miller 87). They are going to have to provide an experience because culture literally wants to

“feel” its way through life (Sweet 43).

With these ideas beginning to surface, one of the adjustments I made during the program was a study and discussion of the use of image and the senses in the biblical revelation. While divine revelation is received in printed form, it was first communicated and, therefore, first experienced in a variety of forms, from the burning bush to a prophetic uncovering, to a cross that echoed with the sounds of a hammer, the agony of sacrifice, and the silence of the darkness. The biblical review and ensuing discussion sparked an interest in the possibilities and potential for creativity in communication. One of the comments that came out the discussion regarded the use of touch in a service where the message picked up the theme of divine healing, and another sparked the idea of literally having a bowl of water to use as a symbol of forgiveness. In the exit interview, one of the participants indicated that the use of the five sense “seems almost void in our modern preaching tradition, yet it is increasingly meaningful as we shift into postmodernism.” This underlines what Sweet says in the research, “Postmoderns want to experience what life is, especially experience life for themselves” (32).

In the final session of the program, all the participants agreed on the simplicity of combining these two qualities—multisensory and image based—rather than keep them as separate. The use of an image engages not only the use of hearing but sight and sometimes touch or smell as well. Another element inherent in the use of these two qualities, is the creative ability to develop an idea or sensory experience that balances both effectiveness and appropriateness with the text and audience. This balance of both effectiveness and appropriateness is worth further consideration.

Much like a sermon that is inappropriately overrun by a “good” illustration, a

sensory experience can go too far. While certainly the biblical text is full of examples that literally confronted people with the truth (we need only turn to the prophets or the call narratives of Moses, Isaiah, or Paul), contemporary preachers would be wise to consider how far they can go with a sensory experience. The audience may become physically uncomfortable or irritable with certain experiences, or they may even miss the point altogether if the sensory experience does not fit the audience's everyday context. Preachers would also be wise not to go too far with certain images that are meant only to be secondary to a move or the big idea of a message. The temptation to carry an illustration or sensory experience too far, is ever present, hoping it will have that "wow" effect that so often seems to suggest the preacher has hit the target. This phenomenon is the narrow ledge of relevance of which Henderson speaks (20). In the preacher's attempt to reach the audience, the biblical communicator goes too far and misrepresents the message.

With this danger in mind, a few questions can be reviewed when considering a sensory experience in the sermon: (1) How did the biblical audience experience this? What use of their hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, or touching was in effect? (2) Is this image or experience reflected in the text, or is it brought from outside the text? (3) Is this image or experience secondary or primary to the move or big idea of the sermon? If secondary, what effect will it have on the audience's experience with the truth? (4) Will this image or experience be effective with this audience? Will it resonate with their world? With whom in the audience will it resonate the most? Will this image or experience cause any negative reactions?

The task of "in-fleshing" the truth of God is no easy responsibility. It is weighty

in its calling and difficult in its application. However, among the lessons drawn from this research project is the importance of continuing to learn how to apply the truth through the critical touch points in the culture. Certainly the conclusion of this research project is that those touch points would include the use of the sensory experience. As Sweet says, effective preachers do not write their sermons, they “create total experiences” (43).

While the data revealed that the effective use of sensory experience is not easy, considerable room for encouragement is available as biblical communicators continue to explore this in their own preaching. In many ways people are repeatedly engaging information through various sensory experiences all day long. They need only to begin to consider how this experience is happening and where it might prove effective in their own communication of the truth.

A New Preaching Matrix

The third observation that can be summarized from the research is the consideration of a new preaching model. If biblical preaching is truly incarnational preaching, then preachers need to experience a living encounter with both the Word of God and the God of the Word. If biblical communicators are going to reach that place where God speaks into the darkness and gives light and life (John 1), then they must consider the ongoing value of the ten qualities.

Initially the research laid out the ten qualities of preaching as follows: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit empowered, authentic, relevant, relational, solution oriented, multisensory, image based, and purposeful. Through the course of the program certain qualities seemed to strike a chord and others were either already assumed or partially reflected in one or more of the other qualities; therefore, I propose a new

preaching grid—an incarnational model—that would endeavor to guide the contemporary preacher in this emerging postmodern context.

This incarnational model is an adaptation of what has been used through the PMPP, drawing on the research, experiences, and data of the project. It also simplifies several qualities, ones, which while important, seemed to take a secondary focus as the program continued. This model still has the postmodern in mind, and its chief focus is the challenge of moving from the ancient to the contemporary. In effect, this model brings with it a process for moving from the one side of the bridge, the ancient text, to the other side, the postmodern world. As I referred to earlier, these are the touch points of communication.

My proposal retains the first three qualities as foundational to the task. They are, as earlier identified, the “irreducible minimums” of biblical preaching.

Biblically based. Many people believe in God and yet few really live under his sovereign lordship because of a misunderstanding of what many are saying is the Word of God. Along with this lack of lordship, is the growing loss of biblical literacy and increasing secular pluralism (especially here in Canada) leaving a void of biblical truth. Thus, nothing needs to be taken away from the first quality. If anything, biblically based preaching needs to be highlighted with greater emphasis. To declare anything else but the truth of the divine revelation is to lose the authority of what truly transforms. As Stott indicates, biblical preachers are called to declare the “living word to a living people from a living God” (97).

Christ centered. The second irreducible minimum remains the centrality of Jesus Christ to divine narratives. In fact in the two and a half years since I first identified

this quality, I have become even more convinced of the necessity of preaching Christ at all times. Observations from my own ministry context reveal that far too many people have little framework for understanding the Bible. They move from text to text and book to book with only a superficial understanding of the larger theological constructs. Thus, the value of preaching Christ is not simply because his life and work are central to the redemptive story, which in itself is a significant reason, but one's relationship with Christ ties the various pieces of Scripture together in the hearts and the minds of the audience. In effect, they begin to see that whether one preaches out of Genesis 3, Ecclesiastes 3, or Revelation 22 the singular construct that draws all those units together is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This truth is not to say that preachers overlook the meaning of a clear unit of thought. No, the work of exegesis must still be done. It is only done, however, with the understanding of placing that piece within the broader meta-narrative of which Jesus Christ is the redeeming factor. Life without Christ, in Christ and because of Christ allows each piece of Scripture to fit into the larger story. This is what was indicated in the theological discussion. The preacher communicates a redemptive message of truth and grace that only comes alive when the listeners find light and life and love in Jesus Christ (John 1:14; 10:10).

Spirit empowered. The final of the first three foundational qualities remains the work of the Holy Spirit. As a human communicator, the preacher is reliant upon the Holy Spirit in preaching, the divine communicator (Azurdia 35). As Piper acknowledges, "The goal of preaching is utterly dependant on the mercy of God for its fulfillment" (98).

A noteworthy point to mention here is that while the Spirit's role is of critical

importance it is not one that is easily measured. Shortly after the first series of sermons were evaluated in the PMPP, the participants became aware of the difficulty in discerning on a five-point scale at what level the message was empowered. Certainly, a discerning sense comes through one's own experience, and through other cues that can be picked up through a prayer delivered at the beginning of a message or the evidences of humility that might be shared throughout the message, but discernment of the Holy Spirit's empowering is no easy task. As critical as the Spirit is in the preaching task, future research might want to consider further how best to assess this quality.

The final four qualities of this new model are the experiential, or incarnational, qualities.

Authentic. I believe what is at stake with this quality has everything to do with the present times. With the failure of the televangelists in the eighties, the exposure of politicians in the nineties, and the lack of character in corporate leaders in the first half of this decade, society is well acquainted with a lack of authenticity. Kouzes and Posner indicate, "[P]eople want leaders who are credible" (32).

In contrast to this lack of credibility in society is the call to true discipleship, a reminder that the work of Christ in humanity is a work that is done through and through (1 Thess. 5:22-23).

If the preacher is going to be effective then they must look at their own heart and soul, they must expose it to the text and the Spirit. This approach provides a place an opportunity for the Word to take affect in the heart of the preacher so that they in turn can bring that Word to the hearts of the people. As much as it can be lost and maligned, the gospel takes flight through the heart and soul of the preacher. Brooks identifies this same

realization in his definition: preaching is truth poured through the personality of the preacher (9).

In the communication process, authenticity affirms the relationship between the preacher and the audience. The audience sees the Word through the heart of the communicator. When the communicator steps away from the message and allows the Word to lie by itself, then the listener begins to question the value of the words because they have not heard the value of the truth in the preachers life. Again, Kouzes and Posner indicates that “[a]bove all else, we must be able to believe in our leaders. We must believe that their word can be trusted, that they’ll do what they say” (32).

This idea of authenticity is also seen in the biblical image of community. God has created humanity to relate to one another in relationship. Those relationships must be real and genuine. If people are going to connect at their deepest level then they must be willing to take the risk of exposing themselves for who they truly are.

Therefore, as the preacher allows the divine revelation to shine through their life the Word is effectively communicated. It, in part, mixes the sacredness with the commonness of everyday life. Having said that though, there is value in considering several questions. For sometimes the challenges of being real can put communicator in a place exposure. Here are five questions for consideration: (1) What does this Scripture say to me? How does it challenge me, expose me, reveal my depravity? (2) How does this passage encourage me? What is the promise to which I cling? Where do I find myself rejoicing? (3) From my own reflection, what would be valuable for my audience to hear? Would seeing their own depravity help them? Would seeing their own need help them? (4) Would anything in my disclosure be misunderstood? Say, from the opposite gender or

someone from another age or social demographic? Is that personal element still worth sharing? (5) In any way that does disclosure take away from the message of the text and instead leave the audience pondering my experience rather than their experience with God?

Relevant. The fifth quality of the proposed incarnational model, and the second of the experiential qualities, is relevancy. Here I combine what was previously outlined in PMPP with the solution-oriented quality. Of concern here are the relevant issues and concerns tied to the audience's world. With what are they wrestling? What is concerning them? Where are their hopes? Where are their dreams? What is happening in their world that brings questions to their mind? The research indicated that good communication reaches the audience "by entering their frame of reference, by participating in their life" (Kraft 25).

Effective communication must be relevant to the questions and the concerns of people. Through the course of this research program, the seventh quality, solution-oriented preaching, was one of two that seemed to fade in importance. The tenth quality, purposeful preaching, was the other one.

What becomes critical here is that communicators must continue to be students of culture if they are going to be relevant. They must remain close to the concerns of every day, "those needs that are pertinent to a person's life" (Henderson 24), and yet from time to time take the wider view so they can see the bigger picture in the human struggle. The danger here is that if they are not careful they will become servants of relevancy. The latest fads, trends, statistics, all can become reasons for staying current. They can work so hard in connecting to the world of the audience that nothing in the message has lasting

value. Nothing, as King Solomon said, has any meaning (Eccles. 1:2).

Therefore, in being relevant preachers are not just doing good application. They are aware of the issues of life and politics, spirituality and society. They watch what is affecting the people around them. They might be aware of the socioeconomic issues that affect a particular congregation or of the reshaping of the world that came with 11 September 2001. Being relevant is not so much a goal as it is a part of the process of good communication. Relevance is the task of speaking in the language of the audience and at the same time allowing the message of the Bible to bear down on them. Good communication is wrapped with culture and at the same time speaks to culture. That is both the task and challenge of relevancy.

Relational. People live in isolation. Every day the average North American sees hundreds, if not thousands of people, yet they live alone. People have houses on the street but few neighbors, places to go but few people going together. What is striking is that in contrast to the present cultural malaise God calls people to live in relationship and community. At the heart of biblical faith, followers of Jesus Christ are called to live life together. God has shaped people to connect with others. Sweet called this “connexity,” the idea of connectedness and community (109). His message of salvation is one of relational restoration, both with God and with one another. This priority is seen from Genesis 1 through to Revelation. Relationships are at the very heart of the gospel.

While the evidences of fractured relationships are in our world every day—pain, isolation, loss of esteem and purpose—the biblical story is a call to redemption. It moves right to the heart of the problem, removing the sin and changing the heart. Therefore, the great value of the message we preach is that it brings hope to a world that is longing for

relational wholeness, with God and with one another. This is one of the needs identified in the Canadian scene. Canadians, according to Bibby, strive for family life, love, and friendship (106).

Multisensory. I have already made a connection with the idea that relevant preaching brings solutions to people's problems. Therefore, solution-oriented preaching does not need to stand alone. Along with that it seems unnecessary to suggest that preaching should be purposeful. That quality is a given. One final quality needs to be highlighted in this proposed incarnational model.

Having already assumed a compatibility between solution-oriented preaching and preaching that is relevant and allowed the final quality to fade (purposeful), two qualities now come together into one: multisensory and image based. As reasoned earlier these two qualities have enough overlap that it is easier to draw them together as one. Therefore, the final of the seven qualities in this proposed incarnational model is that of multisensory preaching. People, as the research indicates, want to "experience life" (Sweet 32).

Given the discussion that has already ensued, I only suggest how best to use this quality in preaching. Here I go back to Miller's three critical questions: What will be heard in the audio portion of the message? What will be seen in the video? How can the audio and video blend together? (38). Biblical preachers can take this too far and allow an image to overrun the message. In order for them to be careful, they need to consider the audio and video portions of the message one at a time asking, What do I want the audience to hear? What do I want them to see?

In regard to the video side of the message, a number of options ought to be taken

into consideration. The preacher can create a word picture that carries the an overall theme or concept through the message, such as the shepherd's love for the flock or the humanness of the broken jars. They can carry a word picture through one part of the message, not as the prevailing theme but more of a touch point with the audience. The book of Ruth provides a good example of this with the words "empty" and "full" in the first chapter. The preacher could also consider creating an image by using a prop that is natural to the biblical text, such as a bowl and towel, or an image drawn on a whiteboard. Beyond those examples many considerations can be drawn from the text. From a creative reading of the Scripture to a change in the participation of the Lord's Supper, each can aid the communication process if sensitively considered. As Quicke observes, this is the age of the image (3).

Having said that, one of the obvious conclusions from the research is the value of considering different preaching styles. By styles I mean approaches such as the textual, narrative, or topical sermon. With respect to the latter, while the preacher may be tempted to read too much into the text, considerable opportunity is there towards engaging the senses.

The strength of the narrative sermon is that there was less of a chance of losing the meaning of the text while still retaining the opportunity to unpack the video image before the audience. Good narrative preaching invites the listener to step into the narrative and experience the God-human encounter that is intrinsically there in the story. Throughout the narrative points of identification can be used as the preacher pulls back the layers of the story and exposes the human need.

While the traditional, textual sermon still provides potential for developing a

multisensory message, it often is limited when confined to the deductive sections of the Scriptures.

In sum, the incarnational model offers a matrix of seven qualities: biblically based, Christ centered, Spirit filled, authentic, relevant, relational, multisensory. The first three reflect the foundational elements of biblical preaching while the final four relate specifically to the incarnational element of effective preaching. These final four qualities complete the bridge, bringing the biblical message to the postmodern world.

Limitations of the Study

Looking back over the project, I see two primary areas that limited my study. One was the inability of the participants to commit to work outside of the class sessions, and the other, was the size of the group. I believe the basic set up of the program was well conceived. The program was set up for interaction and communication around the course content. It would have only been aided with three or four other participants, particularly a female and an older, more experienced preacher in the group.

In addition, the project was subject to my own biases through the evaluation process. While I tried to be objective I ran the possibility of being softer or harder in some of my evaluations. I can see now the benefit of training a third party, possibly someone from the participants' focus group, to do the specific sermon evaluations for each of the participants.

The participants indicated their schedules made it difficult to get their out-of-class work done. That is a fair evaluation, but their own growth and understanding would have been impacted if they had taken the time to look at some of the material beforehand. As one of the participants mentioned, this program could be set up as a seminary course and

that would have provided more motivation for them to do the work.

If I were to do the PMPP again, I would also limit the qualities from ten to seven because of the overlap and redundancy in the ten qualities. Knowing what I know now, I see the simpler matrix gives ample room to cover all the ideas. In addition I would spend more time with the narrative sermon. That style of preaching has a lot of intrinsic elements that connects with the flow of the incarnational matrix.

Another area to consider is in regard to the participants' imagination and creativity. If I did the program again, I would give much more thought to the stimulation and development of this in the participants. The preachers' theological training and natural processing of information pulls them away from the creative process. I have often wondered through the course of this project just how much time the average preacher really gives to the creative side of their craft.

Finally, I believe the postmodern landscape is only just beginning to take shape. The attempt of this research project has only just begun to explore how to preach effectively in this emerging scene. I expect that a better part of my life will be given to understand further how to communicate effectively. The learning has only just begun. Further studies and much discussion still need to be given in the days ahead. As Grenz indicates in the research, whatever postmodernism is, it is only just emerging on the horizon (12).

Lessons That Last a Lifetime

Next to the joy of seeing the PMPP impact the participants, the most satisfying part of the research project has been my own growth and understanding. In their book, Kouzes and Posner suggest that leaders must find their own "voice." By that they argue

that leaders must come to the place where they are able to understand those defining values, beliefs, and convictions for which they are willing to truly live (43-44). In many ways the accumulation of the research done for this project, together with the development and teaching of the PMPP, has enabled me to clarify twenty years of “voices” in my own journey.

Finding My Voice

Blessed with a rich heritage while growing up in a strong evangelical home, I am a second generation preacher. With that have come numerous voices that have spoken into my life. From father to professors, authors to preachers, I have been listening and seeking to imitate their ideas for years. Yet, as indicated in the Chapter 1, one of the motivations for the pursuit of this project has been the desire to pursue my own path and find the answers to some of my questions. The whole three-year process of questioning, researching, clarifying, developing, and applying have paid great dividends. Whether a paradigm shift or a maturing, I like Kouzes and Posner’s idea of finding my voice.

Initially this project involved a feeling of risk and fear. I wondered if maybe in my attempt to “in-flesh” the Word I was actually giving up on God-given methods of communication or that I was making too much over one aspect of biblical communication, particularly that aspect that traditionally had little explanation in my previous years of learning. Through the risk I slowly began to see the fruit my learning and applying and clarifying. That accumulated affect has been most satisfying. As I have observed the effect of my own preaching and heard the feedback from my congregation, I have been motivated to stay the course of my learning. The project from beginning to end has been worth the pursuit.

Three Stages

I realize that many things have shaped my understanding through life, but when I turn my attention to this most recent finding I see three stages through which I went. The initial stage was sparked by Darrell Whiteman's lecture in his Cultural Anthropology class in the summer of 2000. There I first began to ask the question, "Maybe there is a better way?" Along with the valuable coaching from my dissertation adviser and the other learning that was happening that year, I took the question and began to research what it meant to communicate biblical truth effectively in this emerging postmodern context. While my preliminary research concluded with the observation that ten qualities needed to be pursued, the second stage of my growth began as I started to write the curriculum and considered how to bring these ideas to life. With much of the material prepared before the first session, my own understanding of the material continued to take shape through the ten-month PMPP. I was influenced by new questions that needed answers, class comments and observations from the sermon evaluations. All these influences continued to affect that "voice" that was now starting to gather strength.

During this second stage, I remember thinking that this material was really clicking with the participants. In the fifth class, we had a spirited discussion, with lots of interaction around the material. I recall going to the whiteboard and explaining the use of the narrative sermon in our preaching. The ideas I was explaining really seemed to connect with where they were at in their own development. Later I noted in my journal that I finally sensed I had something good to offer the group. This was not just a dissertation project; it was a chance to shape the kingdom.

Four months later I was again struck with how valuable this information was for

the group when one of the participants made the effort to preach a narrative sermon for the first time. Before this point his natural tendency was to craft the sermon with a linear approach, but this time he felt that he needed to preach the story of Jacob in narrative form. Following his message he came to the next session elated. He thought he had really done an excellent job. "I wouldn't have tried it," he said, "if it hadn't been for this group.... It was really helpful to have a sense of how to do this." I knew again that I had something to offer, something that extended beyond myself.

The final stage of my discovery came through the affirmation I received from my focus group. When we met I was surprised to hear how my preaching was connecting with them. Whether in general approach or through the specific content of my sermons, each of them believed that the messages were relevant for their life situation. In the end, I realize I was shaped because I took a risk and stepped out into new territory. My ideas and thoughts were not clarified until I put them on the line, and then through the course of the research project God graciously enabled me to find my voice.

Two Areas of Further Development.

Through this whole project, I see two areas in my preaching that need further development. The first is in relation to the Holy Spirit. As I was evaluating those first few sermons I quickly came to realize that it is hard to know when a message is Spiritfilled. Each time I listened to another recording, I recognized that out of all the qualities this one was the most subjective and the most difficult to anticipate. I was moved with some messages and then with others I was not. This was not sufficient enough reason to claim the work of the Spirit when the sermon was first preached.

While I never fully resolved the issue of how best to mark that quality, I have

carried a question with me since the first pretest: How can I ensure the power of the Spirit in my preaching? The work is futile; it is just seed cast on unyielding soil if the Spirit is not working in and through me. God has given me the burden of preaching but I realize I am powerless to do the work unless he gives me the means to accomplish it (Azurdia 19).

In my desire to understand the work of the Spirit two principles have arisen. First, the work of preaching is the work of the Spirit. Azurdia calls him the “Holy Liason” (36). He is author (2 Tim. 3:16), convicter (John 16:8), transformer (Acts 1-2), and the one who will teach us all things (John 14:6; 16:13-15). While the preacher must study the text, read the audience, apply the principles, the Spirit actually does the work of transformation. Second, the Spirit cannot be contained. While God’s trustworthiness cannot be overlooked, there is a mystery to the way he moves. He comes and goes as he pleases. At times I see him at work, and then at other times I fear I miss him.

Yet this work of the Spirit is what I long for in my preaching. I am committed to continue to grow in my understanding of his presence and power in my life and ministry.

The second area in which I want to pursue development is my ability to use a variety of multisensory images in my communication. I see so much opportunity in learning how to use the visual in my preaching more effectively—from narrative preaching to creative images and metaphors. In recent months I have begun to explore the idea of calling people to response. We have done several different things in our Sunday worship services, from the more traditional invitation at the end of the service to an invitation to place a stone up at the front of the church as an indication of a spiritual marker.

Final Thoughts

What began with a question and then a study eventually turned into ten key qualities for effective preaching. Through the course of the PMPP that group of ten has been shaped down to seven. These seven provide a new matrix for preaching, one that I call “incarnational preaching.” These seven qualities—biblically based, Christ centered, Spirited empowered, authentic, relevant, relational and multisensory—if used effectively, will aid the communicator in bringing the Word to life in the lives of the people.

In looking back over the last three years, I conclude that the process of working through this research project has been very rewarding. The clarification of my “voice” has been fulfilling and encouraging. Along with that personal growth has been a lot of satisfaction that has come from the various people who were involved—either in the focus group or in the PMPP itself. I see that as my ideas have crystallized, my skills have been developed and my understanding has been broadened, I have gained a new willingness to pass on what I have learned to others.

In the end my own growth has been one chapter in a larger story, a story that I believe God has been a part of all along—shaping, sharpening, and preparing me for the next work he has in mind.

APPENDIX A

Letter of Informed Consent

Ric D. Strangway

13474 — 96 Avenue
Surrey, BC V3V 1Y9
604.584.7617
rstrangway@surrey
alliancechurch.org

Dear Friend,

As you know I am working on my dissertation project as part of my studies at Asbury Seminary through the Beeson Center in Wilmore, Kentucky. The project is titled: *Preaching in Postmodern Times: A Peer Mentoring Preaching Program for Effective Biblical Preaching within the Emerging Postmodern Context*. The first three chapters of the dissertation have been completed and approved by my dissertation committee. Now is the time to initiate the research dimension of my project that involves taking a group of peers through a ten-month mentoring program. The purpose of this study is to develop, implement, and evaluate a peer mentoring preaching program (PMPP) that enables other preachers to effectively communicate within this emerging postmodern culture.

As we discussed earlier, our mutual interest in this topic provides us with an opportunity to sharpen our skills and hopefully become more effective in our kingdom service. I am convinced that the challenge of preaching is as great as it has ever been. While we have been well served in our colleges and seminaries with the equipping of biblical exegesis skills, we often fall short in our ability to communicate effectively within this emerging postmodern shift. To that end the PMPP will endeavor to take a group of like-minded participants like yourself through a ten-month course that introduces them to ten key qualities of effective preaching as it relates to postmodernism. As part of the course, participants will be asked to apply what they are learning within their ministry context.

The PMPP is a ten-month program that involves a half-day seminar each month, September 2002 through to June 2003. At each half-day seminar I will guide the learning toward the understanding and application of one or more of the ten key preaching qualities. These monthly seminars will include an instruction time, dialogue around out-of-class readings and multimedia segments, and group interaction over field learning and applications. In addition to the monthly half-day seminar, participants will be expected to apply their learning in their ministry context, gather feedback from a focus group, and be prepared to dialogue on the out-of-class readings. Throughout the program you will also be asked to submit five videotaped (or audio if video is unavailable) sermons for evaluation. The goal of the program is to enable you to learn, digest, and then apply the ten key qualities, thus becoming more effective in your communication within this emerging postmodern context.

The data collected for my projected will come through my observations of the videos,

individual dialogue, feedback from the various participants in regards to their focus groups, the seminar discussions, and my overall impressions of the program. Much of the data will be collected in a journal I will keep that will detail my observations from the various venues, and other data will come from the participants' focus groups and video evaluations. Upon completion of my dissertation, the participants' videos will be returned, and the notes I make in my journal will be kept in confidentiality outside the purposes of the dissertation.

In choosing to participate in this PMPP, it is understood that it is solely on a volunteer basis. While your total commitment to the seminars, out-of-class readings, video evaluations, and field applications are beneficial, you are welcome to step away from any or all of the program at your discretion. In addition, if you have any questions along the way, I would be happy to respond to them.

If you are willing to participate with me in this study, please sign and date this letter below to indicate your voluntary participation.

Sincerely,

Ric D. Strangway

I volunteer to participate in the study entitled *Preaching in Postmodern Times: A Peer Mentoring Preaching Program for Effective Biblical Preaching within the Emerging Postmodern Context* with Ric D. Strangway as the facilitator and researcher. I herein commit myself to the best of my ability to the ten-month program outlined above, and give permission to be quoted, in part or in whole, directly or indirectly, with the understanding that my anonymity will be maintained unless further permission is specifically obtained.

Print Name

Sign Name

Date

Researcher

Date

APPENDIX B

Preaching Observation Guide

Speaker:

Date:

Church / Ministry:

Sermon Text & Title:

The *Preaching Observation Guide* is a tool to help develop skill and expertise in communicating biblical truth within our postmodern context. Listed below are the ten qualities of effective biblical preaching. The evaluation and comments are based on the observation of the message and its relation to the ten qualities of effective biblical preaching as defined below.

10 Qualities of Effective Biblical Preaching:

Biblically based: The message shows clear evidence that its source and authority lies in the Scriptures, i.e., the truth(s) of the message is clearly based in the Scriptures.

Christ centered: The message leads people to the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is a clear sense of the significance of Jesus Christ's life and work and its application to the listener's life.

Spirit empowered: There is a sense of the Holy Spirit working in and through the communicator, i.e., a sense of humility and reliance on the Holy Spirit and an indication that God is present.

Authentic: The speaker communicates with a sense of humility, realness, and transparency. There is a genuineness to his/her words and a sense that he/she is talking with us rather than to us.

Relevant: The message connects with the context of the audience by identifying with their experience in our present culture.

Relational: The message brings clarity and understanding to the listeners' relationships, a sense that some of their deepest human needs have been understood and clarified—needs such as love, acceptance, forgiveness, security, hope, etc. There is also an understanding that spiritual growth is a process, and the speaker has communicated a sense that the application of truth will take time as it is processed in the listener's life.

Solution oriented: The message moves the listeners towards a positive application of the Scriptures in their daily lives.

Multisensory: The message invites the listener to experience the truth through a variety (more than one) of experiences that involve the senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

Image based: The communicator makes use of images in his or her presentation, using either visible and/or mental images.

Purposeful: The movement of the message shows clear evidence of a structure that moves the listener towards an encounter with God and his Word and then leads that same listener towards a practical outworking of that encounter.

Preaching Observation Guide

The evaluation of the ten qualities is based on the following 5-point scale:

| | | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| <i>Not Evident</i> | <i>Unclear</i> | <i>Undecided</i> | <i>Clear</i> | <i>Very Clear</i> |

| Ten Qualities | Evaluation | | | | | Examples of Content Observed |
|----------------------|------------|---|---|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1. Biblically based | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 2. Christ centered | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 3. Spirit empowered | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 4. Authentic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 5. Relevant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 6. Relational | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 7. Solution oriented | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 8. Multisensory | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 9. Image based | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |
| 10. Purposeful | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | |

Overall Evaluation :

Total of 10
Qualities

Comments

APPENDIX C

Outline of PMPP Sessions

Session One: The Divine Truth Advantage

Learning Goals for Session:

1. To provide participants with a clear understanding of the PMPP and outline the goals, involvements, requirements and out-of-class assignments.
2. To provide a basic understanding of postmodernism and its relationship to the local church—particularly in its relationship with biblical preaching.
3. To affirm the fundamental authority of the divine revelation in biblical preaching (Quality 1: biblically based preaching).

Outline of Class:

Opening and Prayer

My Passion and My Theological Shift

- My journey—live for preaching
- My growth in preaching
- My struggle to communicate effectively
- One class—summer 2000, Dr. Darrell Whiteman

Unpack John 1

- The *Logos*—the Word became flesh

Postmodernism

- Question for discussion: how would you define postmodernism?
- Postmodernism 101: Basic overview of postmodernism
- Postmodernism and Canadian culture
- Postmodernism and the local church
- Postmodernism and the task of the preacher

PMPP Overview

- Presuppositions and purpose
- Plan—outline of the ten month program, learning goals, expectations, POG

The Divine Truth Advantage—Quality 1: Biblically based preaching

- Biblical authority
- Crossing the bridge—the divine truth advantage
- Video

Assignment

Session Two: The Redemptive Christ-Centered Message

Learning Goals For Session:

1. To identify the challenge postmodernism presents for the twenty first century church.
2. To outline and explain the overarching theme of Christ-centered redemption in Scripture and its relationship to biblical preaching.
3. To review the fundamentals of “big idea” expository preaching.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Welcome and sharing—a key observation learned about preaching over the past four weeks

Review Postmodernism

- Review key elements of postmodernism
- Identify the gap between postmodernism and the church
- Present “touch points” for the gospel and twenty-first century

Question and Answer

- Questions regarding setup of focus groups

Redemptive Christ-Centered Preaching

- A biblical theology
- Identifying the “fallen condition focus”
- Preaching Christ

Expository Preaching

- Fundamentals of expository preaching
- The significance of the “big idea” in preaching
- Overview of textual, topical, and narrative preaching

View and Evaluate

- Video

Assignment

Session Three: The Living Spirit and Authenticity in the Preacher

Learning Goals:

1. To understand the role of the Holy Spirit and his relationship to the preacher and the preaching task.

2. To identify the necessity of preaching from the inside out.
3. To develop a working picture of “authentic preaching” today.
4. To explore topical preaching and its value to preaching in the postmodern context.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Sharing—Biggest challenge in preaching

Review Reading

- Christ-Centered Preaching, Chapell—the centrality of Christ in our preaching, his brokenness and redemption in contact with our fallenness and depravity
- Culture Shift, Henderson—secularism, modernism, postmodernism
- Market Place Preaching, Miller—the audio-video sermon

The Living Spirit—Quality 3: Spirit-empowered preaching

- Question—What is the relationship of the person and work of the Holy Spirit to preaching?
- A biblical theology—the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the human deficiency
- Discussion—How does this happen in the communicator’s preaching? How do we become vessels endowed with God’s divine power?
- A presentation of a practical framework for preaching out of the Spirit’s power
- Discussion

Authenticity in the Messenger—Quality 4: Authenticity

- Video
- The present mistrust in our culture
- The importance of living from the inside out
- Critical question: how do we do it?

Exploring Preaching Styles: Topical Preaching

- Key elements of topical preaching
- The potential application of the topical sermon

Assignment

Session Four: Making A Relevant Connection

Learning Goals:

1. To identify the present Canadian cultural mosaic and its relationship to

- biblical Christianity.
- 2. To present a path for moving from content to context—identifying the key touch points and significant markers for relevant preaching.
- 3. To explore narrative preaching.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Discussion questions—How does our personal holiness, or lack thereof, affect our preaching? What do you do, or what are you trying to do to minimize the impotency of your preaching? In what ways are you trying to stay relevant to the culture?

Review the Ten Qualities of Effective Biblical Preaching

Making a Relevant Connection—Quality 5: Relevance

- Critical elements of communication theory

The Canadian Mosaic

- Our history journey—What does it mean to be Canadian?
- Defining characteristics of our present culture
- The “West Coast” factor—What makes us unique?—Discussion
- Building the bridge: moving from revelation to relevance—touch points for bringing the truth to bear on the lives of our congregations

Exploring Preaching Styles: Narrative Preaching

- Key elements of narrative preaching
- The potential application of the narrative sermon
- Mark 1:40-44

Assignment

Session Five: Relationally Focused Preaching

Learning Goals:

1. To understand a biblical theology of community and relationship.
2. To understand the present dearth of authentic relationships in our culture—exploring the what and the why.
3. To identify critical touch points for relationship-focused preaching.
4. To explore narrative preaching and its value to preaching in the postmodern context.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Question—how do we preach when we find ourselves feeling the effects of a personal situation or a series of circumstances that leave us discouraged on a Sunday morning?

Review Sermon

- Question regarding my self-disclosure—when does self-disclosure go too far?

Exploring Preaching Styles: Narrative Preaching

- Key elements of narrative preaching—involving the listener, deductive vs. inductive, the homiletical plot

Quality 6: Relationally Focused Preaching

- Society's hunger for relationship—looking for a relational fix
- Created for relationship
- Question—what can we do to touch this human need effectively in our preaching?

Closing

Assignment

Session Six: Solution-Oriented Preaching

Learning Goals:

1. To review the key qualities of effective biblical preaching and their application to the preaching task.
2. To explore the need for answers in a society that is going through significant changes.
3. To explore solution-oriented preaching and its relationship to the process involved in spiritual formation.
4. To introduce a biblical foundation for communicating with symbols, metaphor, and images.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Welcome

Discussion

- Definition of the “postmodern person”
- Critical four assets—authenticity, community, experience, and acceptance

Discussion:

- “Postmodern Preaching”

Quality 7: Solution-Oriented Preaching

- Definition: the message needs to move listeners towards a positive application of the Scriptures in their daily lives
- A positive application in their daily life—goal is spiritual transformation
- Key elements of preaching: exposition, illustration, and application

Connecting Answers with Spiritual Formation

- Critical question: How do we move from solutions to spiritual formation in this postmodern world?

Highlights Of PMPP Preaching

- Encouragement and highlights from submitted sermons

Introduction to Qualities 8 and 9: Symbols, Metaphors, and the Role of Experience in the Life of the Gathered Community

- Introduction to multisensory and image-based preaching
- Biblical foundation for the correlation of image and experience
- Jesus' use of image, metaphor, and experience
- The connection to biblical preaching

Review Focus Groups

Assignment

Session Seven: Preaching and the Five Senses

Learning Goals:

1. To understand how multisensory communication was used in biblical revelation.
2. To understand how experiential, multisensory communication is used in our contemporary context.
3. To explore practical and creative ways to bring the biblical truth to bear on the whole person, using sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touch.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Share what has been happening in your ministry the past few weeks

Paradigm Shifts

- Report on learning from focus groups
- Questions: As you look back over the past seven months what has been reaffirmed in your understanding? What are you learning that is new? What is

most challenging to your thinking?

Understanding Experiential, Multisensory Communication

- Communication is: a communicator, a message, a receptor
- C. Miller's three questions: What will be heard? What will be seen? How can the video and audio blend together?
- Communicating through the five senses
- Discussion—how can we use the five senses in our preaching?

A Survey of Biblical Multisensory Communication

- From Genesis to Ezekiel
- From Jesus to John's revelation

Multisensory communication

- How can we do this?

Reviewing Relevance

Assignment

Session Eight: The Power of Picture

[This session was cancelled due to participants' schedule. The material was worked into the final two sessions.]

Session Nine: The Power of Picture

Learning Goals:

1. To understand the impact of the visual on our thinking and understanding.
2. To explore how image-based communication can be used effectively in biblical preaching.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Share the most memorable "image" from your childhood. How did that impact you?

From Thinking to Seeing

- Three eras of communication: preliterate, literate, electronic
- A new way of thinking: using both the ear and the eye
- Befriending the communication and cultural shifts

The Power of Picture

- From word based to image driven
- Reasons why metaphors are the key to creating biblical spirituality: humans think in images, postmodern spirituality is image based, and worship is not about style, it's about spirit

Image, Metaphor, and the Divine Revelation

- Defining metaphors seen in the divine revelation: deliverance, conquest, shepherd, powerful river, bread of life, prodigal son, chosen, sojourners, Christ the lion and lamb

Bringing Images to Life

- Audio example, "The Hands That Changed the World," Easter sermon, R. Strangway

Making This Happen

- Question—how do we do this?
- Possible ideas: look for natural opportunities in the text, start small, tap into the "heart images," think about helping people think in pictures, use slow motion and stop motion

Assignment

- Sixth sermon due at beginning of session ten

Session Ten: No Greater Task

Learning Goals:

1. To review of ten qualities of biblical preaching.
2. To understand the process of communicating an "idea."
3. To reaffirm the authority and task of biblical communication.

Outline of Class:

Opening

- Who or what has shaped you the most as a preacher?

Narrative Example

- Narrative example from one of PMPP participants: "God in My Figure Four Leg Lock"

The Big Picture

- What are we trying to accomplish? We are recognizing the world of the Bible, the world of our audience, and the task of biblical preaching

- Specifically, applying the ten qualities of biblical preaching

Quality Ten: Purposeful Preaching

- Question: What does it mean to say we are purposeful in our preaching?
- The communication of an idea—what does an “idea” look like, clarifying the idea, communicating the idea

No Greater Task

- The significance of the preaching task
- The authority of the Word of God
- God has spoken
- God continues to speak

“Biblical Authority”

Evaluation

APPENDIX D

Exit Interview Questionnaire

BETWEEN 2 WORLDS PREACHING PROGRAM: EXIT INTERVIEW

The Goal

The goal of this ten-month preaching program was to increase our effectiveness in communicating God's truth within the emerging postmodern context.

To that end we focused on ...

- Gaining an understanding of postmodernism—what it is and what it isn't
- Clarifying defining elements of our Canadian culture
- Understanding the proposed ten qualities of effectiveness in this context
- A brief introduction to three styles of preaching—expository, topical, narrative
- Gathering for ten sessions—from September 2002 to June 2003
- Processing the learned information through six evaluated messages
- Garnering feedback from a focus group

Questions

Your evaluation and feedback is a valuable part of this program. It provides critical understanding on what were most beneficial, effective, and/or weak. Please feel free to express your perspective whether positive or negative—your comments will only help me better analyze the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of the preaching program.

1. As you look back over the ten months, what have been the two or three greatest learning points for you?
 - What stood out for you as particularly valuable?
 - What was the least valuable for you?
2. Given the focus of the program—effective biblical preaching in the postmodern context—what would you have liked to see more of?
3. When it comes to postmodernism do you feel like you have an initial understanding of it and how it affects our contemporary audiences? (Yes/No)
If yes, what is it about postmodernism that stands out in your mind as critical in our communication?
 - What are you still uncertain about?

4. Of the ten qualities presented in this program, which ones stand out for you as particularly critical if we are going to be effective in communicating in this postmodern context?
5. Which of the ten qualities that we looked at seem least significant? Why?
6. If you were to make a list of qualities that we need to key on in our contemporary preaching, what would you add to this list?
7. As you look back on the ten monthly sessions, place a value on each of the following elements in terms of their benefit to you (1—least valuable, 5—most valuable)

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Teaching/content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Discussion/interaction | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Audio/video examples | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Application—6 sermons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Assigned reading—books | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Supplementary reading | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
8. Of the ten sessions, explain what part(s) of the sessions was more beneficial for you?
9. What part(s) of the sessions was the least beneficial? Explain.
10. What could be improved on in the sessions?
11. If you had a chance to meet with your focus group, what was your greatest learning point from those gatherings?
12. As you look at the whole preaching program—the purpose, ten sessions, assignments, etc.—what could be done to make it more effective? How could it be improved?
13. Do you feel that your own preaching has been affected by this program? (Yes/No) In what ways?
14. Other comments ...

APPENDIX E

Focus Group: Informal Question and Answer

A Word of Thanks

Question & Answer

1. Biblically based. Definition: The message shows clear evidence that its source and authority lies in the Scriptures, i.e., the truth(s) of the message is clearly based in the Scriptures.

- Think back over my preaching during the past month, what is one of the BIG ideas that really grabbed your attention? Can you recall where that idea came from in the Bible?
- Do you get a sense that I was teaching exactly what the Bible said, or do you feel that some of what I said was based on my own or other people's ideas?
- Was there a clear explanation of the text, or did you find that things were confusing or hard to follow?

2. Christ centered. Definition: The message leads people to the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is a clear sense of the significance of Jesus Christ's life and work and its application to the listener's life.

- Can you think of a specific way in which you have been drawn closer to Christ or feel closer to him either during or since hearing one of the recent sermons?
- Was there a connection with the main idea of the message and our experience of relationship with Jesus Christ?

3. Spirit empowered. Definition: There is a sense of the Holy Spirit working in and through the communicator, i.e., a sense of humility and reliance on the Holy Spirit and an indication that God is present.

- Has there ever been a point in one of the sermons where you sensed the presence of God in a special way? Explain.
- Were there times when you did not sense God's presence or voice in the sermons? Give me an example?

4. Authentic. Definition: The speaker communicates with a sense of humility, realness, and transparency. There is genuineness to my words and a sense that I am talking to you rather than at you.

- Imagine you are watching me speak for a moment. How would you describe me as a person when I am up at the front? What kind of person do you see up there? [Probe-Describe that (quality) for me?]
- Answer the following four questions silently with a yes or no (use cue cards):
 1. Do you feel like I was being genuine while I was speaking to you? (Y/N)
 2. Could you sense a spirit of arrogance while I spoke, like I knew it all? (Y/N)
 3. Do you feel that I was someone you could trust? (Y/N)
 4. Did you feel like you were being spoken down to? (Y/N)
- Do you have any advice for me on how I could do this better?

5. *Relevant.* Definition: The message connects with the context of the audience by identifying with their experience in our present culture.

- Can you give me an example of how one of my messages identified with your life?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how easy is it to apply my sermons to your life?
- How could I do better at this?

6. *Relational.* Definition: The message brings clarity and understanding to the listeners' relationships, a sense that some of their deepest human needs have been understood and clarified—needs such as love, acceptance, forgiveness, security, hope, etc. There is also an understanding that spiritual growth is a process and the speaker has communicated a sense that the application of truth will take time as it is processed in the listeners' lives

- Was there anything that was said that helped you understand or relate better to those around you? (Probe—give me an example)
- We all have various needs in our life, issues or concerns that we are particularly aware of, was there any needs that you saw me touch on?

7. *Solution oriented.* Definition: The message moves the listeners towards a positive application of the Scriptures in their daily lives.

- If you can recall a particular message, go back to the main idea of one of the messages. Did you see any connection between that main idea and how it could be positively applied to your life?

- Can you give me an example of how one of my sermons helped answer one of your questions?

8. *Multisensory.* Definition: The message invites the listener to experience the truth through a variety (more than one) of experiences that involve the senses—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching.

- Can you give me an example of how one sermon involved more than one of your senses (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching)?
- Was that a helpful experience for you? Why or why not?

9. *Image based.* Definition: The communicator makes use of images in his or her presentation, using either visible and/or mental images.

- Can you give me an example of a picture or an image that was used in one of my messages? Describe that. What was the meaning behind that image?
- Was that helpful (using an image)?

10. *Purposeful.* Definition: The movement of the message shows clear evidence of a structure that moves the listener towards an encounter with God and his Word, and then leads that same listener towards a practical outworking of that encounter.

- Can you describe how one of the main ideas was developed through the whole message?
- Was there a sense that this main idea was developed clearly, or did you get lost sometimes?
- Was there an application of this main idea to your life?

Further comments ...

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